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Inclusive education in Guyana : perspectives of policy makers, teachers, and parents of children with special needs

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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN GUYANA: PERSPECTIVES OF POLICY MAKERS, TEACHERS, AND PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines inclusive education within Guyana for children with special needs (0-8 years), from the perspectives of policy makers, teachers, and parents of children with special needs ($N = 22$). The study is framed within a constructivist perspective, and uses a grounded theory design and analysis. Findings indicate four factors which are potential barriers to implementing inclusive education in Guyana: attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs, change agents, resources, and experiences with children with special needs. This study describes the interrelating relationships among the core phenomenon (i.e., attitudes toward those with special needs), and the other conditions (i.e., change agents, resources, and experiences with children with special needs). The interrelationship between these factors stimulates strategies or actions. These lead to consequences which prevent sustainable and successful inclusive education within Guyana. There is a discussion of recommendations and conclusions which may assist in supporting inclusive education within Guyana.

Key words: special needs, inclusive education, Guyana, grounded theory, developing country

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> Each individual is born with a distinctive temperament...We indiscriminately employ children of different bents on the same exercises; their education destroys the special bent and leaves a dull uniformity. Therefore after we have wasted our efforts in stunting the true gifts of nature we see the short-lived and illusory brilliance we have substituted die away, while the natural abilities we have crushed do not revive (Jean Jacques Rousseau as cited in Dewey, 1966, p. 116).

Inclusion and Inclusive Education

The principles of inclusion emphasize the active participation of every child within the natural environments of their community (Frankel, 2004). It respects and values the diversity of each child, acknowledging that he or she is a contributor to society, regardless of abilities (Crippen, 2005; Rallis & Anderson, 1994). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities acknowledges that all children with special needs have equal human rights and freedom as any other child (United Nations, 2006). This coincides directly with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which declares that all children (with or without special needs) have fundamental rights to an education, and to experience full involvement within society (Frankel, 2004). The Salamanca Statement also reaffirms the pledge of "Education for All", acknowledging the rights of children, youth, and adults with special needs to obtain an education within any regular education system (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994). This statement also asserts that regular classrooms should accommodate to meet the needs of all children as a means of reducing prejudiced attitudes, and to promote a more accepting society (UNESCO, 1994). Together, these documents confirm the essential requirement for each society to maintain an inclusive education system.

Inclusive education is a practice which ensures that every child rises to his or her fullest potential while validating their uniqueness (Rallis & Anderson, 1994). Inclusive education is a system which supports and accommodates for the diverse needs and abilities of all students within a typical education setting (Bergsma, 2000; Crippen, 2005; Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Skrtic & Sailor, 1996). Therefore, children with special needs should freely attend neighborhood schools, learn collectively among their peers without special needs, and fully participate in meaningful social and academic activities as members of the class (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Oremland, Flynn, & Kieff, 2002; Skrtic & Sailor, 1996). Inclusion is the practice of establishing heterogeneous classrooms where every child strives to accomplish individual goals. This often requires modifying the curricula and/or the environment in order to ensure the success and attainability of these goals (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Oremland et al., 2002). In implementing inclusive education, there must be educational reform and restructuring of the school system (Bergsma, 2000). This will provide a learning environment which is committed to teaching and accommodating for diverse needs among children (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). Inclusive education focuses on changing the system to suit the children.

Inclusive education for children with special needs is an evolving issue within many developing countries (i.e., countries which maintain low-income and middle-income economies, where a majority live on less income and lack essential public services compared to extremely industrialized countries [The World Bank Group, 2006]). Approximately 600 million people with disabilities exist worldwide, all of whom encounter physical and social boundaries within cultural life (UNESCO, 2006; World Health Organization [WHO], 2007). Of this total, it is estimated that 80% of people with disabilities live in developing countries (UNESCO, 2006; WHO, 2007). One hundred and fifty million of these are children with disabilities, of which less than 2% are receiving rehabilitation (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002).

lack of services available to these children (U.S. Department of State, 2006). In fact, the "description of provisions for children with disabilities..." within the 2005 Report is as vague as the 2002 Report (Non Governmental Organization [NGO], 2003, p. 9). Guyana's teacher education programs do not provide adequate special education training for teachers, and many graduate without sufficient skills and knowledge to teach children with special needs in an inclusive environment. Within Guyana, there is a demand for teacher training, special needs specialists, and a fundamental reform of the education system in order to allow for the principles and practices of inclusive education (Bergsma, 2000; National Development Strategy, 1996; NGO, 2003; O'Toole & Maison-Halls, 1994; O'Toole & Stout, 1998).

Inclusion versus Mainstreaming

In the last decades, new terminology has surfaced pertaining to the education of children with special needs (Bergsma, 2000). Frequently, the terms mainstream and inclusion are interchangeably used within various education systems. However, there is a vital philosophical difference between the two. The ideologies of mainstreaming assert that children with special needs are capable of meeting the existing standards of the regular classroom (Bergsma, 2000). This notion of being capable to meet these standards assumes that children with special needs must work their way into these classrooms until they are capable enough. Many mainstream classrooms adhere to the pull-out approach where children with special needs must leave the classroom in order to receive any additional support services or aids (e.g., resource rooms) (Bergsma, 2000; Fisher, Roach, & Frey, 2002; Skrtic & Sailor, 1996). This approach indicates that the problem resides with the child with special needs, rather than with the educational environment or classroom (Fisher et al., 2002). Conversely, inclusion maintains a philosophy of accommodating for children with special needs within the regular classroom. Additional supports and consultative staff assist children with special needs within the classroom (Bergsma,

2000). The curricula, as well as any instructional programs are modified to accommodate for the diverse needs of all children. Therefore, children with special needs are not required to meet the standards of the classroom, rather the classroom meets the individual needs of all children.

Researchers suggest that there is greater academic achievement among children with special needs within inclusive classrooms than those who receive an education which adheres to pull-out approaches. Stevens and Slavin (1995) examined 76 children with learning disabilities over a 2 year period. Forty of these students were placed within an inclusive classroom in which they received in-class support via "cooperative learning" (p. 329). Conversely, 36 of the children with learning disabilities received an education via the pull-out approach. The children who received supports within an inclusive classroom demonstrated higher achievements in language, math, and reading scores compared to those who were pulled-out.

Within an inclusive classroom, children with special needs may receive more instructional teaching compared to those who are pulled-out of the classroom to learn. Haynes and Jenkins (1986) demonstrated that children who obtained additional supports within their inclusive classroom received double the amount of reading instructions compared to children who attended the resource classrooms. The researchers concluded that once these students arrived at the resource room, started the lessons and returned back to class, their learning and instruction had been interrupted; there was a discontinuity in the teaching they were receiving. It appears that the pull-out approach can lead to a decrease in the amount of instructional learning children with special needs may receive (Fisher et al., 2002).

Benefits of Inclusive Education

Controversies exist concerning inclusive education for children with special needs. Bateman and Bateman (2002) suggest that inclusion within the regular classroom is not ideal for all children with special needs, as often it is not as "individualized" or "structured" as a special

In examining developing countries within the Caribbean, there are indications that certain Caribbean countries are making great attempts toward inclusive education. These particular countries include those within the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). This signed union includes nine Eastern Caribbean countries (i.e., Antigua and Barbuda, Commonwealth of Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia and St Vincent and the Grenadines) to collaboratively promote unity and wholeness among all its countries (Armstrong, Armstrong, Lynch, & Severin, 2005; OECS, 2006). The OECS formulated regional educational strategies, as well as developed an education unit to support children with or without special needs. This unit is solely responsible for reforming policies, developing curricula, exams, and terminology which become standardized throughout the OECS countries (Armstrong et al., 2005). Countries such as St. Lucia and St. Kitts are actively engaged in implementing special education policies and units which involve trained special needs educators (Armstrong et al.).

However, unlike the aforementioned countries, Guyana is a developing Caribbean country which has not yet established essential inclusive education policies, laws, and practices for children with special needs. According to the 2002 census, approximately 2.2% (10,876) of its population consisted of those with special needs (National Commission on Disability [NCD], 2005). Guyana has not yet developed an official definition of the term disability, and is still in the midst of implementing programs for identifying special needs in early childhood (International Disability Rights Monitor [IDRM], 2004). While Guyana does maintain a National Policy on the Rights of People with Disabilities, it does not specifically address children's rights, accessibility of buildings, transportation, or inclusive education for children with special needs (IDRM, 2004; United Nations, 2004). The 2005 Guyana Report on Human Rights Practices does not clearly acknowledge the rights of children with special needs or the

education classroom (p. 3). Another debate is that children with special needs may be quite disruptive within the regular classroom, interfering with not only the teacher's ability to instruct, but also other students' ability to learn (McCarty, 2006). Irmsher (1995) explains that many teachers and parents of children without special needs are concerned that inclusive education will lower academic standards within the regular classrooms. However, the overall literature indicates exceptional benefits of inclusive education.

The benefits of inclusive education extend well beyond children with special needs. The positive impacts of inclusive education also effect children without special needs, families, teachers, and society as a whole. Researchers have demonstrated correlations between inclusive integration within the classroom and " 'the quality of life of citizens with disabilities' " (Killoran, Tymon, & Frempong, 2007, p. 82). An inclusive education system provides children with special needs with the opportunity to learn from peers. Children with special needs have shown improvements in areas such as language and communication, social and play skills, cognitive and motor abilities, as well as in their independence and decision making skills (Killoran et al., 2007; Oremland et al., 2002; Stahmer & Carter, 2005).

Ingersoll, Schreibman, and Stahmer (2001), examined children with autism who were identified as either "high peer avoiders" or "low peer avoiders" within an inclusive toddler classroom (p. 344). Ingersoll et al. (2001) demonstrated that overall, *all* children within this classroom showed some increase in language abilities (i.e., "high peer avoiders", "low peer avoiders", and children without special needs). Therefore, within inclusive classrooms, children with special needs do improve in language and communication abilities to some degree.

Many researchers have suggested that the behaviours of children with special needs are positively affected when placed within an inclusive classroom (Hauser-Cram, Bronson, & Upshur, 1993; Odom, 2000). Through various observational tools and scales, Hauser-Cram et al.

(1993) monitored the effects of inclusion among 148 pre-school classrooms. Findings indicated that children with special needs who participated within a classroom which maintained a high degree of inclusion exhibited greater social behaviours than those within a classroom with a low degree of inclusion. These children demonstrated a higher frequency of peer engagement and peer influence compared to children with special needs in a classroom with a low amount of inclusion. In addition, they displayed less resistance toward teachers and dèmonstrated higher rates of persistence, resistance of distractions, and independence while completing tasks.

Within an inclusive classroom, children without special needs also show improvements in cooperation and social skills, in addition to maintaining awareness and acceptance of those with disabilities (Killoran et al., 2007; Oremland et al., 2002; Stahmer & Carter, 2005). Hestenes and Carroll (2000) demonstrated that children without special needs rated hypothetical children with special needs at a very high level of acceptance if they participated in a full inclusive classroom. Similarly, Okagaki, Diamond, Kontos, and Hestenes (1998) revealed that children without special needs who attended an inclusive child-care perceived hypothetical children with special needs (i.e., physical disabilities and language disabilities) to equally possess the same amount of friends as children without special needs. These children also reported that they were equally willing to play with children with or without disabilities. Okagaki et al. (1998) observed these inclusive classrooms during free play periods, and concluded that children without special needs independently chose to play with children with special needs. Therefore, children without special needs maintained optimal awareness and social acceptance of children with special needs while in an inclusive classroom.

Children without special needs increase not only their awareness of disabilities, but also their knowledge of disabilities (Diamond & Hestenes, 1994; Odom, 2000). Diamond and Hestenes (1994) conducted semi-structured interviews with children without special needs who

were integrated within two inclusive pre-school classrooms. Classroom 1 included children with hearing impairments, whereas Classroom 2 included children with only motor and cognitive delays. Results indicated that children without special needs who participated within Classroom 1 had a deeper understanding of sign language, and how hearing loss affects one's ability to speak, compared to children in Classroom 2. It is important to note that the teacher of this inclusive classroom did not teach any lesson plans regarding hearing loss or communication via sign language throughout the year (Diamond & Hestenes, 1994). Pre-school children without special needs within inclusive classrooms are able to recognize, think, and learn about various special needs through observation and interaction among their classmates who have special needs.

Families with or without children with special needs also receive many benefits from inclusive education. Both families may foster a more optimistic attitude toward children with special needs, and maintain more accepting perspectives toward diversity (Oremland et al., 2002). Bailey and Winton (1987) measured family expectations of children with and without special needs who attended the same inclusive child-care. Both groups of families expressed that the leading benefits of having their child within an inclusive classroom would be to introduce them to the realities of the world, while also promoting greater acceptance of children with special needs.

Teachers may develop greater acceptance, awareness, and understanding of students with diverse needs, as well as gain a sense of intrinsic gratification for improving the quality of life for children with special needs (Oremland et al., 2002). Society as a whole benefits from inclusive education, as it promotes awareness of diversity and acceptance of those with special needs. A society with inclusive education represents practices and ideologies which maximize the possibilities and promises of all children (Oremland et al.).

Attitudes and Beliefs

Oskamp (1991) explains that attitudes and perspectives are learned concepts which may be influenced by genetic and physiological factors, personal experiences (salient or repeated incidents), parental and group experiences, and the media. The combinations of parental and personal experiences are predominant influencing variables when examining discriminatory attitudes. Research has indicated that children's attitudes and perspectives are related to their parents prejudice, and thus children directly adopt the prejudice (Jodl, Michael, Malanchuk, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2001; O'Bryan, Fishbein, & Ritchey, 2004; Oskamp, 1991). The prejudice perspective is learned through the family or culture (Oskamp, 1991). Negative perceptions of those with special needs are sustained through generational effects. Namely, traditions, perspectives, and attitudes are passed down from one generation to the next. Furthermore, the variable of group pressure is a central determinant of attitudes and perspectives. In particular, the conformity pressure of a cultural environment imparts an array of assumptions and traditional beliefs, which determine the attitudes established among its societal members (Oskamp, 1991).

Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusion

Smith and Leonard (2005) explained that educators' attitude toward inclusion of children with special needs is the most important factor for success or failure of implementing inclusive education. Therefore, positive teacher attitudes and personal beliefs pertaining to inclusion are significant indicators in establishing successful inclusive education. Maintaining a moral purpose is considered to be a teacher's intrinsic motivation for "making a difference in the lives of students" (Fullan, 2003, p. 18). A moral purpose provides an explanation regarding what inspires an educator to transform or change any element within the classroom and school (Layton, 2005).

Teacher efficacy is also critical in strengthening teachers' positive attitudes toward inclusion. Teacher efficacy consists of two main facets: 1) teaching efficacy, which is the universal belief that teachers can affect student learning despite other influences, and 2) personal efficacy which refers to a teacher's level of confidence in their own teaching abilities (Freytag, 2001; Sookdak, Podell, & Lehman, 1998). Soodak et al. (1998) surveyed 188 teachers regarding their attitudes toward inclusion of children with special needs. Teachers who were more receptive toward inclusion of children with special needs maintained higher teacher efficacy (both teaching and personal efficacy). That is, teachers with high teacher efficacy did not perceive inclusion with feelings of "hostility". Furthermore, teachers who maintained high levels of personal efficacy demonstrated lower levels of anxiety when considering inclusion of children with special needs. Therefore, a teacher's perception of their own teacher efficacy greatly impacts their attitudes and beliefs toward notions of inclusion.

However, through a literature analysis, Avramidis and Norwich (2002) revealed that regardless of teachers' positive attitudes, there was no indication that teachers accepted the total inclusion for all children with special needs. Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion were affected by characteristics of the child's special need (i.e., severity and type), as well as the environmental and human resources available to support the child. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) also demonstrated through a research synthesis that approximately 67% of general education teachers supported notions of inclusion. A majority of teachers who supported the concept of inclusion also expressed a willingness to include a child with special needs within their regular classroom (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). This indicates that general education teachers also appeared to maintain positive attitudes and beliefs concerning inclusion. However, approximately 33% or less of the general education teachers, believed they received adequate training and resources to include children with special needs within their classrooms (Scruggs &

Mastropieri, 1996). The majority of the teachers (approximately 67%) did not feel that they received sufficient special education training. Therefore, although teachers in this study maintained positive attitudes toward the inclusion of children with special needs, they encountered difficulties in implementing inclusion within their classrooms due to a lack of training and resources.

Research also indicates that ongoing teacher training/professional development is a vital component for successful inclusive education. Vaughn and Schumm (1995) demonstrated that general education teachers do not feel adequately prepared to meet the needs of children with special needs (academically or behaviourally), and they desire to receive additional ongoing training or professional development in order to better provide inclusion for children with special needs. Through interviews with teachers and principals Rose (2001) reported that the need to receive supplementary training or professional development was a pervasive concern. Findings indicated that teachers did not feel prepared or confident in their own abilities or experiences to provide an inclusive environment for children with special needs (Rose, 2001).

Implementing successful inclusion often requires adequate support staff or human resources (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). However, teachers frequently feel there is a lack of human resources, and this poses great barriers to implementing successful inclusion (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). Rose (2001) examined preschool teachers' and principals' perspectives of necessary requirements for successful inclusion. All participants (N=27) expressed the importance of accessing support staff. Forty-five percent of the teachers believed additional support within the classroom was essential to providing effective inclusion. Therefore, the support of other professionals is beneficial in providing inclusion for children with special needs. Professional resources and other support staff may provide teachers with relevant knowledge and assistance to deal with any challenges the teacher may be facing in implementing inclusion

(Crawford, 2004). Furthermore, the teacher and the professional support staff may collaboratively develop innovative strategies and plans in order to greater facilitate inclusion for children with special needs (Crawford, 2004).

Attitudes toward Those with Special Needs within Guyana

Society. Societal negative attitudes are reported as the main barrier preventing Guyanese children with special needs from equal educational access (Ministry of Education and Cultural Development Guyana, 1995). Groenewegen (2004) concluded that Guyanese communities continue to stigmatize those with special needs, and perceive them as a societal burden. Guyanese with special needs are rarely presented with opportunities for self development and employment (Groenewegen, 2004). The NCD surveyed the perspectives and experiences of 1485 people with special needs across Guyana. Roughly half of the participants (44%) experienced negative attitudes from Guyanese society due to their special needs (Mitchell, 2005). Specifically, participants reported experiences of name calling (60%), staring (49%), resentment (17%), exclusion (12%), and other (3%) (Mitchell, 2005). Participants indicated its contribution to their low self-esteem and hindrance from being involved with society. Consequently, the incessant discrimination discouraged those with special needs from participating within the community. Approximately 49% of participants felt ashamed and disrespected due to the negative perceptions of others, and 14% of participants reported complete social isolation neither leaving their homes nor having home visitors (Mitchell, 2005).

Teachers. Groenewegen (2004) explained that within Guyana, few teachers are willing to welcome a child with special needs into their regular classroom. However, in the few cases where a child is admitted into the regular classrooms, teachers struggle to dedicate the extra attention necessary for the child with special needs. Mitchell (2005) also reported that teachers'

negative attitudes inhibit the participation of children with special needs in the regular schools of Guyana.

Parents of children with special needs. Groenewegen (2004) described most Guyanese parents as frequently keeping their children with special needs at home, hidden away from society. Children with special needs are rarely permitted to go out into public, and many neighbours are unaware that a child with special needs resides next door (Groenewegen, 2004). The NCD report indicated that 107 or 46% of respondents with special needs never attended school. Over half of these respondents (53%) expressed this was due to parental attitudes, "Parents did not encourage me" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 27). During focus groups, parents of children with special needs described experiences of blame from other family members and friends, asking them "what they had done wrong in life to get a child with a disability" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 60).

Change Agents

Establishing successful inclusive education requires support from those who are external advocates for the change or internal agents of change (Frankel, 2006). Frankel and McKay (1997) discuss the importance of incorporating knowledgeable change agents who are familiar with the reform taking place. Change agents may be leaders within the higher levels of the education system (e.g., principals, government officers, etc.). In examining school reforms in Chicago schools, Bryk, Sebring, Kerbow, Rollow, and Easton demonstrated improvements in approximately 473 elementary schools over time as a result of successful principal leadership (as cited in Fullan, 2001). Bryk et al. reported that these principals collaboratively facilitated change (i.e., including parents, community, teachers, etc.), maintained a focus on student learning, possessed effective management abilities, and amalgamated pressure for the change with support (as cited in Fullan, 2001). Hargreaves (2004) also explains that principals must foster positive

power as a leader, demonstrating a moral purpose and strength to advocate for what is best for the children and attainable by teachers.

Change agents must also recognize that educational reform is a collaborative process. This collaboration assists in developing a collective vision when implementing inclusive education (Frankel, 2006). As demonstrated by Bryk et al. principals who were effective agents of change toward inclusive education, led the reform in a collaborative manner (as cited in Fullan, 2001). Hunt, Soto, Maier, Liboiron, and Bae (2004) examined inclusive education for preschool children with severe special needs. Hunt et al. (2004) discuss the need for collaboration among educational members who share similar ideals of including children with special needs in all social and educational aspects of the school system. These authors explain that collaboration includes sharing of expertise, identifying similar goals, creating supports, and delegating responsibilities (Hunt et al., 2004, p. 141).

Change agents (or leaders of inclusion) also serve as exemplars of genuine inclusion, and thus "influence their staff's attitudes and beliefs about inclusion" (Irwin, Lero, & Brophy, 2004b, p. 118). Irwin et al. (2004b) demonstrated how inclusive education change agents may influence the attitudes of teachers within regular classrooms. Using a 30 item scale pertaining to pro-inclusion attitudes, Irwin et al. suggested that teachers under the supervision of directors who were leaders of inclusion, maintained greater positive attitudes toward the inclusion of a wide range of children with special needs (i.e., behavioural, medical, developmental, and sensory). In addition, these teachers consistently perceived children with special needs as benefiting children without special needs.

Challenges for Developing Countries

Developing countries encounter countless challenges when attempting to implement inclusive education. For example, the facilities to accommodate for children with special needs

are often non-existent or inadequate in many developing countries (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). Many developing countries lack basic educational materials and equipment to provide a sufficient education for children with special needs (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Peresuh & Barcham, 1998). While special needs facilities are quite rare among developing countries, a few may be found within the urban centers of these countries. As a result, many children with special needs who live in rural areas do not receive any form of education due to transportation and financial issues (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002).

Another obstacle to implementing inclusive education in developing countries is the need for trained special education teachers and professionals (Stough, 2003). Many colleges or universities in developing countries may provide training for regular and special needs teachers, but there is a concern regarding the adequacies of the programs. These programs tend to concentrate on the pathology of disabilities, rather than instructing on modifications to suit the needs of the child (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Stough, 2003). In addition, there is a lack of programs for professionals which assist in supporting the overall quality of inclusive education (e.g., psychologists, speech and language pathologist, therapists, etc.) (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002).

Developing countries struggle to maintain a suitable funding structure to support special needs programs or reforming of the education system. Chaikind, Danielson, and Brauen estimated that providing educational services for children with special needs could cost 2.3 times more than providing an education for children without special needs (as cited in Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). As a result, special needs education is not a priority among the government's budget within many developing countries.

There is often a lack of compulsory laws, policies, and legislation within developing countries to ensure the provision of inclusive education and other services for children with special needs (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002; Hall & Figueroa, 1998; Peresuh & Barcham, 1998).

These challenges are evident among various developing Caribbean countries. For example, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago have not implemented adequate policies and programs which promote notions of inclusive education (Bergsma, 2000; Hall & Figueroa, 1998). Neither country has developed policies at the macro level which support the restructuring of the curricula, teaching methods, attitudes of the teachers, and professionals (Bergsma, 2000). Although, even when appropriate policies are implemented within Caribbean countries, there are still delays in the practice of these policies. In examining the Eastern Caribbean countries of the OECS, there are indications that inclusive education policies and notions of education reform have been established. However, challenges still exist in the ability to perform and practice meaningful inclusive education at the micro level (i.e., schools) within each country. Present challenges include funding for long-term educational reform, discontent within the teaching profession, insufficient teacher training, and teacher attitudes (e.g., teacher resistance or unsupportive perception toward children with special needs) (Armstrong et al., 2005).

Despite the array of existing challenges, various developing countries are adequately implementing inclusive education. Countries such as Mongolia have established a new inclusive education curriculum for the Preschool Education College within its capital city of Ulaanbaatar (Jigjidsuren & Sodnompil, 2005). Within the last decade the Costa Rican Ministry of Education has established various educational service models which allocate special education professionals throughout the country (Stough, 2003). Costa Rica has also implemented inclusive education laws for students with special needs (Stough, 2003).

Guyana has implemented Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) projects as a grass roots approach to include children with special needs into neighborhood schools (Miles, 2001; NGO, 2003). The CBR projects seek to promote the awareness of special needs, as well as involve the participation of rural communities within Guyana in developing and implementing

rehabilitative programs for children with special needs (O'Toole, 1993; O'Toole & Maison-Halls, 1994; O'Toole & Stout, 1998). Through training from rehabilitation therapist, members within the community (e.g., teacher, parents, health care workers, volunteers, etc.) are empowered to develop programs and supports for children with special needs (O'Toole, 1993; O'Toole & Maison-Halls, 1994; O'Toole & Stout, 1998). Nevertheless, the benefits revealed by the CBR projects have not instigated any development of inclusive education policies or practices for educational reform within Guyana.

While it is understandable that developing countries must confront numerous challenges when attempting to implement inclusive education, a few developing countries are rigorously striving to overcome these barriers (i.e., Mongolia and Costa Rica). These developing countries aspire to develop and enforce inclusive education policies, as well as reform educational infrastructures to allow for greater inclusion of children with special needs. These efforts are also observed within developing countries of the Eastern Caribbean states (i.e., St. Lucia and St. Kitts). However, despite the benefits of inclusive education and examples of its implementation within other developing countries, Guyana demonstrates a sense of hesitation in implementing inclusive education.

Most policies are developed and established in a "top down" fashion, and often policy makers within developing countries do not have the necessary funds and information required to implement such policies. In addition, they may face resistance or challenges from teachers and parents. Conversely, teachers may perceive a lack of training and resource supports. Parents of children with special needs may feel there is a lack of encouragement for parental involvement within the schools.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore inclusive education for children with special needs (ages 0-8 years old) within Guyana from the perspectives of policy makers,

teachers, and parents of children with special needs. The goal was to document and acknowledge the many emotions, experiences, attitudes, and challenges pertaining to inclusive education within Guyana. Through this exploration it will be possible to develop a theory pertaining to inclusive education within Guyana.

In order to access these perspectives, it was necessary to ask the following questions: What does inclusive education mean to each group of participants, and how do they perceive children with special needs? What are the participants' experiences with children with special needs? What are the challenges in providing inclusive education within Guyana? What necessary supports do the participants believe are required in order to ensure for inclusive practices within the schools of Guyana? Finally, what progress has Guyana made in terms of implementing inclusive education policies and practices? Discovering the extent of these diverse perspectives may provide explanations to support inclusive education policies and practices within Guyana.

Methodology

Grounded theory is a qualitative design used to systematically generate theories rooted within the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Within this study, the term theory "denotes a set of well developed categories (e.g., themes, concepts) that are systematically interrelated through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some relevant social, psychological, educational, nursing, or other phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 22). Discovering a theory involves the continuous comparison of emerging categories within the data, as well as theoretical sampling of data collection procedures, concepts, and diverse perspectives to emphasize properties of the categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 2003; Creswell, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Wuest, 1995). In addition, a grounded theory research design asserts "theory as process" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 32). The theory is methodically and sequentially expanding and changing over time; it is never considered to be completely precise and perfect. Therefore the theory is perceived to be grounded within a reality of social action and interactions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Wuest, 1995). It is neither the " ' minor working hypotheses' " nor is it the "grand" theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 33). Rather, it is a middle-range theory founded in the perspectives of various individuals and data sources explaining a substantive or empirical topic (Creswell, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Design

For the purpose of this study, a grounded theory design was utilized in order to inform a theory concerning inclusive education policies and practices within Guyana. This theory is grounded in the perspectives of policy makers, teachers, and parents of children with special needs. Systematic and rigorous procedures were utilized to develop this theory. Such procedures include the use of open, axial, and selective coding, as well as the construction of a

coherent paradigm or visual diagram of the generated theory (Creswell, 2005). Each of these procedures will further be discussed within the data analysis section.

Sampling. Participants for this research study were non-randomly selected. The sample population and regions were obtained from both convenience sampling as well as purposeful sampling. Convenience sampling was utilized, because of feasibility and access to the participants and regions (Del Balso & Lewis, 2001). The participants, regions, and communities were conveniently selected based on collaboration with supporting organizations of this research study (i.e., UNICEF Guyana and the Guyana Ministry of Education). Purposeful sampling was also utilized, as all participants and regions within this study maintained certain characteristics to meet the purpose of this study (Creswell, 2005; Del Balso & Lewis, 2001). Specifically, maximal variation sampling was used as a form of purposeful sampling since multiple perspectives from diverse groups were gathered in order to highlight issues of inclusive education within Guyana (Creswell, 2005). The sample of participants differed based on their titles (i.e., policy maker, teacher, or parent of a child with special needs), regions, and communities within the regions. Another purposeful sampling strategy used was theoretical sampling because the participants were intentionally selected to generate a theory (Creswell, 2005). Participants were selected based on "theoretical relevance" for developing categories and properties related to inclusive education in Guyana (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 49; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Data collection. The data collection for this study was via a 4 week data collection period within Guyana. All obtained data and information was gathered through the use of individual interviews, focus group interviews, observational field notes, and documents. The data collection portion of this study will further be explained in the procedure section of this paper.

Setting

Guyana is situated on the northern Atlantic coast of South America, west of Suriname, east of Venezuela, and north of Brazil (Guyana News and Information [GNI], 2007; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2000). Guyana's population is estimated at 769,000 (2007 est.) and is comprised of approximately 50% East Indians, 36% Blacks, 7% Amerindians, and 7% Caucasian, Chinese, or mixed (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007; GNI, 2007).

Regions. Guyana is composed of 10 administrative regions. Three regions were selected for this study: Region 2, Region 4, and Region 6. Approximately 48, 411 (2002 est.) reside in Region 2/Pomeroon-Supenaam Region, most of whom live within Amerindian settlements or within more established villages along the coast (Bureau of Statistics [BOS], 2006; Greene & Emanuel, 2001; Guyanaguide.com, 2006). The communities of Region 2 selected for this study include Adventure, Suddie, Taymouth Manor, and Cotton Field. The population of Region 4/Demerara-Mahaica Region is around 309, 059 (2002 est.) where a majority live on the coastland, specifically in the capital city of Georgetown (BOS, 2006; Greene & Emanuel, 2001; Guyanaguide.com, 2006). Guyana's capital city, Georgetown, was selected for this study. The population of Region 6/East Berbice-Corentyne Region is close to 122, 849 (2002 est.) where a majority reside near the Corentyne coast (BOS, 2006; Greene & Emanuel, 2001). New Amsterdam was the only city selected from Region 6 for this study.

Participants

UNICEF Guyana and the Guyana Ministry of Education assisted in recruiting participants. Due to possible coercion from either organization, it would have been ideal for neutral persons within the communities to aid in the recruitment process. However, this was not feasible. To reduce the amount of potential coercion, the researcher sent UNICEF Guyana a recruitment flyer which they distributed within the communities (see Appendix A).

Participants within this research study included policy makers, teachers, and parents with children with special needs. A majority of participants conversed in Guyanese Creole English, while others spoke in Standard English. In addition, most participants were Guyanese citizens of African descent. Five policy makers from Region 4 participated within this study. This included representatives from the Guyana Ministry of Education and from the NCD. Nursery school and primary school teachers within Region 2 and Region 6 also participated within this study. These teachers instruct children ages 0-8 years old in either special needs schools or public schools. Of the 13 teacher participants, nine had either completed or were in the process of completing, the requirements for a teaching certificate at the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE). As indicated throughout interviews, these teachers range in teaching experience between 2 months to 36 years, with an average of approximately 12 years. Four parents with children with special needs from Region 4 and Region 6 also participated within this research. Each parent had no more than one child with special needs. Therefore, a total of 22 participants were included within this study (see Table 1).

Consent forms were tailored to suit each group of participants (i.e., policy makers, teachers, and parents). Prior to conducting each interview, participants signed the consent forms. The researcher also verbally reassured confidentiality among participants as well as within each consent form. Only titles (e.g., policy makers) and pseudo names were used throughout this research paper. In addition, during focus group interviews, all participants signed a Promise of Confidentiality form to help ensure that shared information remained confidential.

Procedure

Each participant was either individually interviewed or participated in a focus group interview. The interviews were conducted in a private office, boardroom, or classroom. Interviews were between 30 to 90 minutes in length. A semi-structured interview guide

approach with open-ended questions and pre-established topics, issues, and probes were used (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2003). Questions concentrated on the participants' emotions, experiences, attitudes, and concerns regarding inclusive education within Guyana. Distinct interview protocols were designed for each group of participants (see Appendix B and Appendix C). Also, to support focus group interviews, a focus group guide/script was created. It included an introduction, purpose of the study, guidelines for the focus group, consents, assurance of confidentiality, and closing statements (see Appendix D).

All interviews were recorded through the use of audio taping and observational field notes. These notes were documented as accurately as possible, recording participant information (e.g., type of interview, name, start and end time, etc.), as well as any emerging themes, non-verbal cues, behaviours, emotional climate, and reactions. The observational field notes provided richer insight when used alongside the audio taped interviews. To ensure for greater accuracy and to limit the amount of interpretive errors, the researcher read the observational notes to participants at the end of each interview in order to allow for any corrections. This member checking was also used in the focus group interviews to verify the general feelings of members regarding inclusive education in Guyana (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005; Creswell, 2005).

Data Analysis

All audio tapes, notes, and documents were gathered and transcribed. Member checking by reading observational notes to participants at the end of each interview verified responses and key points/themes, as well as ensured for greater accuracy and clarity. Validity of responses was also provided through triangulation: cross referencing the obtained data with different sources of information (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Creswell, 2005). This was carried out by comparing transcripts, observational field notes, and government documents.

The obtained data were analyzed and coded using a systematic design in grounded theory. To organize and interpret the gathered data and information three phases of coding were applied: (1) open coding, (2) axial coding, and (3) selective coding (Creswell, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Categories, constructs, and relationships were established through the use of these coding procedures and memos. This assisted in generating a theory to explain inclusive education within Guyana.

Open coding. During open coding, all data was gathered and divided into sections in order to form categories and subcategories relevant to the purpose of this study (Creswell, 2005). The data was segmented, analyzed, compared, and contrasted (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The researcher was guided by the data, continuously creating categories and subcategories with properties and dimensions until they became *saturated:* the data no longer provided any new information to develop categories (Creswell, 2005; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Categories were established through continuously asking questions of the data (e.g., what is happening here?, what are these statements emphasizing?, are there patterns within the data?). Once transcripts were coded and various categories emerged, subcategories and properties were identified. For example, during the interviews all participants discussed issues of the predominant attitudes/perceptions maintained by Guyanese society toward those with special needs. This was coded as "attitudes maintained by Guyanese society", and became one subcategory in the emerging category which described "attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs". Within this subcategory, various properties were accounted for, such as discrimination, stigmatization, perceptions maintained by medical professionals, dependency of those with special needs, ignore/hide those with special needs, etc. For instance, Baily, a special needs teacher stated,

> In this country, persons with disabilities is like they don't exist. They don't talk about them much, people hardly know that there are persons living with disabilities, they don't even know that there are special needs schools and so on....People in society, society, their whole outlook of person with disability is negative. It's 95% negativity....

Properties emphasized in this statement are the negative societal attitudes toward those with special needs, and the tendency to ignore/hide those with special needs.

Four significant categories were identified through the process of open coding: 1) attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs, 2) change agents, 3) resources, and 4) experiences with children with special needs. These categories were identified throughout all groups of participants. Within these categories, various properties and dimensions were also investigated.

The first category, **"attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs"**, reflects individuals' beliefs, feelings, and thought processes pertaining to those with special needs, in particular children with special needs. **"Change agents"**, the second category, refers to the notion of having individuals who are knowledgeable and accustomed to the principles of inclusion and inclusive education. Change agents also serve as leaders and advocates for children with special needs. They can stimulate change toward an inclusive education system within Guyana. The third category, **"resources"**, represents the supports necessary for the successful implementation of inclusive education. This includes teacher training/professional development, parent training/parent support groups, human resources (e.g., in-class supports, professionals specializing in areas of special needs and/or special education), equipment and materials, and finances. **"Experiences with children with special needs"** is the final category. It emphasizes the nature of the participants' past or current experiences with children with special needs. The quality of these experiences may be positive or negative.

Axial coding. After establishing major categories and properties, the second phase of analysis was conducted; axial coding. During this phase, one category was selected and identified as the central core phenomenon of the process explored (Creswell, 2005). This core category was selected based on the following criteria (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 147): it can be related to all categories, it frequently occurs within the data, the relationship established among the other categories is logical, the label given to the phenomenon should be abstract, the theory is enhanced when the concept is improved, and the explanation is still supported if conditions change. The other categories and properties were then related to the core phenomenon, creating interrelationships between all established categories (Creswell, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This involved identifying emerging conditions, strategies and interactions, as well as consequences of using these strategies (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). A coding diagram was developed to visually display and describe these relationships (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Creswell, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). For example, "attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs" was considered to be the central category, as it fits the aforementioned criteria. The other categories (i.e., change agents, resources, and experiences with children with special needs) were identified as conditions which are associated to "attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs." Strategies (e.g., parents of children with special needs hiding their children from society and schools) and consequences (e.g., absence of inclusive education within Guyana) were also influenced by the core category and the conditions.

Selective coding. In the final phase of the analysis, a broad theory was generated and refined from examining the interrelationship among the categories (Creswell, 2005; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After creating a storyline, a theory was discovered providing "an abstract explanation for the process being studied in the research" (Creswell, 2005, p. 398).

Theoretical Assumptions

This study is framed within a constructivist perspective: acknowledging and validating participants' subjective views, experiences, and meanings pertaining to inclusive education within Guyana (Creswell, 2003). These views and meanings are socially, historically, and culturally constructed (Creswell, 2003). Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that the researcher is the main research instrument used within the data collection process (as cited in Creswell, 2003). As the primary research instrument, it is acknowledged that the researcher filtered the data through personal life, cultural, and ethnic experiences and perspectives. Therefore, the researcher made interpretations in an attempt to understand participants' perspectives in order to generate a theory grounded within these views (Creswell, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The researcher's ethnic heritage is Guyanese. Immersed within a Caribbean cultural context, the researcher's family maintained religions from South Asia (i.e., Hinduism, Islam), and experienced the struggles of a developing world entwined with great racial and political tension. This led to the researcher's decision of selecting Guyana as the country for this study. While acquainting with the people, visiting schools, entertaining the village children, conducting interviews, and being fully submerged within the Guyanese culture, the researcher experienced a great sense of ethnic connection. This connection provided the researcher with greater ambition to justly represent participants' voices. The researcher's "insider" knowledge of the culture, traditions, and language, was also beneficial in understanding participants' responses, developing a rapport with participants and the children, as well as quickly adjusting to the new country.

Findings

The core category, as well as emerging conditions, strategies, and consequences assists in developing a broad theory to explain the process of inclusive education within Guyana. This theory highlights specific factors which may be perceived as potential barriers to implementing inclusive education within Guyana. Four significant themes were identified: 1) attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs, 2) change agents, 3) resources, and 4) experiences with children with special needs.

Attitudes/Perceptions toward those with Special Needs

Participants reported that the prevalent negative attitude among Guyanese society, teachers within regular schools, and parents of children without special needs was one of the greatest challenges in implementing inclusive education within Guyana.

Attitude of Guyanese Society

Many participants highlighted that Guyanese society tends to perceive those with special needs as dependent and therefore belong within the confines of the home rather than out in schools and the community. Policy maker Hilary, who also has a special need, reflected on her aspirations but lack of support within society,

> I always dreamed of being a graduate...I didn't know professional what, but I knew I had to have something behind my name, and I had to be sitting at a desk, I had this dream...I was swimming, I was swimming in my dreams, not supported by society at a very early age...and actually I made the top five in my school.

Penny, a policy maker, also affirmed the negative attitudes of the Guyanese culture toward those with special needs,

> Our culture, our attitude, you know the stigmatism...all of these things are a part of what hampers the progress of children with disabilities. Specifically in this country, because we tend to want to, once we recognize the person has a disability we say, 'well they can't do anything educationally' you know and we put them in the background...the first move

> for any sort of inclusion for persons with disabilities is orienting peoples' minds and attitudes towards the capabilities of persons with disabilities.

Whitney, another policy maker from the NCD with a special need stated,

> ...you get a lot of negative attitudes, 'wha deh need to go out and work for? You know they have a disability, you should stay home, get taken care of.' But not every person that has a disability looks at it that way. 'Cause I for one, when I was home for about one year and a half, I got tired of being home...I want to go out somewhere, I want to work...you want to be independent.

Haley, a teacher from a special needs school described her experiences, "Society need to accept whomsoever. Because even in Guyana sometimes I can remember a time in Cooney Island [uncertain spelling] and when you take out these children [with special needs], they tend to look at you and label you."

Participants also disclosed the tendency for Guyanese society to ignore and discriminate against those with special needs. Jessie, a teacher from Region 2 described her encounters of children with special needs being ridiculed by both children and adults,

> Yes, you know we have attitudes. There's some people who would call them, persons with disabilities, names. And they would, you know, fatigue them, pelt them and things like that, so they must have an attitude....they must change their attitude so that persons with disability would not, you know, they wouldn't interfere with them so that they can feel less important. They shouldn't pelt them, they shouldn't call them by false name...they would call them names, you know—they're stupidy, they can't do nothing.

She continued to describe the employment opportunities within Guyana for those with special needs,

> ...they would give them the less, the less degrading part of a work, any work to do. You know, if you got rubbish or so to pick up, let them pick it up or so. So, if they get that [inclusive education] then they would change their attitude towards persons with disability. They would see them, not because I'm like this I must pick up rubbish or sweep or anything like that.

Gale, a parent of a daughter with special needs, described a more accepting environment for those with special needs in other Caribbean countries. She stated,

> I don't know if you visited any other Caribbean country, it's fabulous. If you hear at home on the news that they the latest Caribbean news, in the corner showing sign language and people know that they cater for those kind of children. In my country, they don't. Everything that goes on in Cuba and these other places...down to the children that don't hear and don't talk they know what's going on because they have it on the television for them. It's not public here...it's still hidden, special needs and disabilities.

Certain participants also reported the apathetic and discouraging attitudes of the Guyanese medical community. Penny sincerely described,

> My son was born with this physical disability. And as I sit here, I don't have a medical diagnosis for my child being born...I don't have it. Obviously, they always point at you, as you caused the child to be born with the disability, so they ask you all sorts of questions. So you get the blame, but they never come up with something that to tell you that well this child has whatever...don't lambaste them as one doctor did to me 'why did you make this child? He's going to be nothing else then a liability to you, and a burden to society.' I got that from a doctor. My child was 6 weeks old and I had to take him to that doctor. I came out of his office in tears saying this it for me. A doctor...'don't expect me to do any miracles here for this child'.

A parent, Gale, also reminisced of when she received information regarding her daughter's special needs,

> She's dumb, deaf, and also blind in one eye. They say the cause of that is Rubella...Rubella syndrome and in medical form they call it German Measles, I had that...They say that the brains didn't get to develop as they should, but I think it developed because she's quick to catch on and she do a lot of things, just like a normal child.

Gale did not view her daughter as having an undeveloped brain, but rather as having a normal functioning and intelligent brain. None of which the doctors reported to her.

In fact, due to the attitudes of the medical community, participants considered medical professionals as requiring more training in order to develop empathy, compassion, and knowledge specific to those with special needs and disabilities. Haley, a special needs teacher

from Region 6, recalled an occasion of taking a child with special needs to the hospital. She stated,

> You need the trainers...in the hospital...I remember I take a child, a child fall and she was hearing impaired, to the hospital. The doctors, they couldn't handle the child, they just assuming the child is not feeling pain. You find when you're trained in this area you kind of get feelings for the person, right. You know exactly what the person's going through, right.

Penny reported,

> The medical doctors, they also need to have some sort of training in detecting disabilities and finding the right medical terminologies...they use the word *vegetable*. That's what you're going to be a vegetable, nothing else. That's a terrible word to use. They don't know that, they need training, they need to understand...it's a human being! That's the first thing they must recognize, it's a human being and that person must have the rights like everybody else. But no! As far as they're concerned what do you do with a vegetable...do you pick it, you cut it up, you cook and you eat it!? But they don't know. I've been through a lot with my son with medical personnel.

Attitude of Teachers within Regular Schools

Participants also recurrently discussed the negative attitudes maintained by teachers in regular schools toward children with special needs. Participants described teachers within regular schools as lacking the patience to cope and attend to children with special needs. Penny considered her son's teachers within the regular schools,

> You know the teachers don't have what it takes to teach a child with a disability...they can not cope with that situation. I have to be going over every lunch time, I would skip across to the school to make sure he goes to the bathroom and things like that. But doing the school work, that was a challenge, because he wouldn't be given so much attention as a child at the top of the class, okay....nobody took this special interest in him.

Parents also reiterated the teachers' lack of interest and patience for their child with special needs when attending a regular school. Sandy, Nadine, and Gale discussed experiences when their child attended the regular classroom,

> Nadine: "Yeah, because he was doing nothing [in the regular classroom]. He would sit down at the back carpet and the teacher would pay no interest at him..."

Sandy: "Right, that is the problem with those schools."

Nadine: "Them teacher them don't understand them, how to deal with them."

Gale continued, stating,

> Honestly speaking in the public school, the normal school, the children that have disabilities they don't see them. They don't provide for them. They think 'well they have disability, they should be closed up.' I don't think that should be. They all need attention, they're all equally normal like the rest of them, it's just they need a little more attention. And in this country, they don't provide for that....they [teachers in regular schools] wouldn't find time to talk to that child. They get so hasty....we have young teachers now and not all of them can handle it.

Sandy responded, "They don't have the patience, they don't have the patience."

Special needs teachers explained the importance of being patient when working with children with special needs. Baily conveyed,

> Here, it's definitely challenging, because patience is a must. You have to have, and it's not usual patience that you have to have to get to teach the regular children, you have to stretch it a bit more, it requires a lot of patience and understanding...it's definitely a challenge, a lot of work needs to be put into it on the teachers' part.

Caron echoed this stating,

> The job is challenging, very challenging. Sometimes you come in with good moods and stuff but because of the development of the disability that the children have and sometimes teaching is a tedious job, right and teaching special ed. children is more tedious than teaching the regular and the effort you have to put in, right.

Policy makers, Kale and Whitney explained teachers' perceptions of receiving a child with special needs within their regular classroom. Kale believed teachers maintained this negative attitude because it becomes a burden,

> We now want teachers to be mothers, we want them to be policewomen, we want them to be nurses, we want them to be psychologists, we want them to do administrative work, and so on and so forth. So this poor teacher has to be all things to all people. At the same time she is a mother, a grandmother, a sister, whatever, dealing with her own challenges in her own home and so on, and then we expect her to come into this classroom and be all things to all people. And now we're saying to her 'alright, take a

> child with special challenges into your class'...you know, add to what you're already doing....some of them will feel 'oh god, another burden.'

Whitney considered fear as the contributing factor to the negative attitude maintained by teachers in regular schools. Imitating a teacher, she stated, " We're [the teachers] probably scared that something will happen to them in our presence and have to explain what happened to this child while they're in our care."

However, teachers within the regular schools acknowledged a lack of time for attending to children with special needs, rather than a lack of patience. Hazel, a nursery school teacher expressed the challenge of balancing time between the children with special needs and those without,

> It's just you take a little time, a little more time for that child with special need, you take a little more time...you have to burn more time with that child...not forsaking the others right, because you know that they can work on their own, but then that child [with special needs]...you have to spend a little more time with that child, that particular child.

Jessie, a primary school teacher revealed, "they ain't able with things like that...they're taking up too much of my time and things like that."

Attitude of Parents of Children without Special Needs

Participants also accounted for the negative attitudes sustained by parents of children without special needs. They described occurrences of teasing and ridicule toward children with special needs from these parents. Jessie, a teacher, considered situations of when she had to refrain such parents from name calling children with special needs,

> ...you have to tell them [parents of children without special needs] don't call the boy over there don't call him 'dumb boy', or don't call him 'deaf boy', he has a name. Don't call this one 'limpy' you know, he has a name.

Nadine, a parent of a child with special needs, explained her avoidance of parents of children without special needs due to their negative perceptions,

> Well, we never explain to them [parents of children without special needs] because like if we explain to them they will say something different. I don't...I keep away from them...When he come out of school [regular school], they say 'why you take him out?' I say I take him to a private school, I can't tell [special needs school] because some of the parents them make fun of him, like something bad. So that's what I have to tell them.

Participants reported that parents of children without special needs tend to blame the mother for the child's disability. Gale, also a parent of child with special needs noted, "I would put it as the parents lack intelligence. I think if they were fully intelligent they can't blame the child or the mother." Participants also mentioned that these parents perceived something terrible happening to their child if they associated with a child with special needs; perhaps their child may "catch" the disability. Penny, a policy maker and parent stated, "When it comes to the adults...the bigger people, they are the ones who carry thing "don't, don't play with that child, something gonna happen to you."

Change Agents

Each group of participants highlighted that Guyana lacked individuals who are educated and experienced advocates for inclusive education. The absence of agents who may assist and support change within the education system makes it difficult for inclusive education to occur. Jen, a policy maker described this obstacle,

> ...we don't have a coordinator to oversee to pull these people [teachers, professionals, people within the Guyana Ministry of Education] together to meetings. Like if it's time for training so that person now knows the person, and can nominate that person to be trained local or overseas and so on....

Similarly, Hilary, another policy maker from the NCD stated, "...they need to have a disability policy coordinator to focus on those issues [inclusion] and who works with others in education to getting special education." Another policy maker from the NCD, Penny, passionately described the need for inclusive practices organized by those familiar with inclusion. She stated,

> We need a system that comes from the minds of those who are able to detect these persons with disability and get ready for them as they come to

> school...accessibility....How do they get into the school? Do they have to climb steps when they can't climb steps? How do they work in the regular classroom even though they are children with disabilities? How do they work? That kind of system is what is needed to get a spiraling effect moving up to the policy makers and coming back down, trickling down to those who are down here. We need that kind of system, with so it can work. But we don't have that here.

Teachers also emphasized the lack of change agents for inclusive education in Guyana. Haley, a special needs teacher from Region 6 expressed the absence of those who are willing to establish inclusive education within Guyana. She stated, "It's [inclusive education] on the table but nobody's pick it up. Nobody pick it up...Because they're saying that they want inclusive education, it's on the table but there is nobody who is picking it up." Teachers from Region 2 also indicated the need for knowledgeable individuals who could publicly educate and disseminate information regarding special needs. Hazel, a primary school teacher expressed,

> ....we need people to sensitize the public about children with disabilities so that they would know that [about special needs] and bring them out to society so that they would interact with other people and don't be ashamed of these children, don't be ashamed of them.

Guyana Ministry of Education

Many participants perceived change agents as the responsibility of educational officers within the Ministry of Education. Teachers such as Andrea stated,"...we need support from educational officers." Parents also revealed the challenge of obtaining support from the Guyana Ministry of Education to implement an inclusive education system. Gale, a parent with a daughter with special needs from Region 4 maintained that, "...even if we want that [inclusive education] to happen, a lot of parents don't find the time and they're not bold enough to stand up to the educational officers for that to happen, even if we want it." Other parents of children with special needs from Region 4 agreed that the support from the Ministry of Education was required for inclusive education. Nadine confirmed that, "The first thing is we need support from the educational officer. Without he or her support we can't get anywhere."

Whitney, a policy maker within the NCD, clearly indicated the need for change agents among the higher levels of government in order to stimulate a change toward inclusive education within Guyana. She expressed,

> If you can't get those at the top, how are you going to get those at the bottom level. Because if they're gonna look and say 'oh he's at the top, he doesn't care, why should we care', you know. So once those at the top level start to show interest then you see gradually it will come down and eventually everyone will show interest. But as long as you don't get that interest from the top level, you could talk until your face goes blue and no change will happen...you know.

As participants disclosed, currently there are no individuals within the Ministry of Education who have placed special education as a priority.

Baily, a special needs teacher honestly stated,

> Well, going back to government and supports I think the government needs to make special education a priority. I think that's the thing, right? They need to make it a priority, because right now education for special children is like a don't care issue.

Haley also reaffirmed the disregard for special education with the Ministry of Education. She stated, "Especially in Guyana they focus more on the regular education, right. They don't focus that much on special education."

Resources

All participants expressed the inadequate amount of resources to successfully implement inclusive education in Guyana. The required resources included teacher training/professional development, human resources, funds, equipments and materials, and parent support group/training.

Teacher Training/Professional Development

Participants acknowledged the lack of teacher training and professional development within areas of special education and disability. Brie, a teacher from Region 2, stated,

> First I think that at least we need more training, right. Training...'cause I would say if we have the blind, the blind coming to school we would able to know how to cope with the blind...we don't have that much knowledge.

Another teacher from Region 2, Gabiee, stated, "You really got to do training and so on to deal with them. You can't really go around handling them just like that, you must have some sort of training to deal with them." Baily, a teacher at a special needs school in Region 6 expressed concern for the teachers in the regular schools, "...when you put them [children with special needs] in the regular schools, the teachers to teach them have to have knowledge of special education." Parents also believed that more training is required for teachers working with children with special needs. Gale noted, "I think if they go to a training school they'd be more qualified and would be able to interact with the children." Rose, a parent with a son with special needs from Region 6 also stated,

> Yeah, they have to be trained, because how would they know the language and the sign to teach them. Because you can't just go and pick up somebody from somewhere and bring them to the special needs school.

Policy makers such as Whitney firmly stated,

> We need training of teachers, better training, so they will be better equipped on how to handle a child with special needs....you cannot put a child with a disability in a regular school with a teacher that has no idea how to be able to take care of that child when they have them from 8:30-3:30 in the afternoon...they're their parents at that time and they should be able to know how to deal with that child with those few hours that they're with them...I think they should be better educated in how to be able to take care of children with disability.

Teacher training and professional development were still recognized as insufficient despite the fact that approximately 3 years ago the CPCE introduced a mandatory special education course for all pre-service teachers. Policy makers such as Penny and Kale described this course. Penny stated,

> There is no specialized training...special education in Guyana is optional...they have to do it yes, but the choice to stay as a special teacher, to graduate as a special teacher is

> optional. But within the curriculum for teachers, you have to do special education, at least the first year. At least for the first year introduction....

Kale expressed,

> ...any teacher trainee going to the teacher training college would do a module in special education. This is not a very specialized module...this training [specialized] we can't offer here. If we have people like that, they generally go off to move in Jamaica or some other place, but none of institutions have the capacity to offer this training.

It is important to note that acquiring a teaching certificate/degree is not a requirement to teach within schools in Guyana. Approximately 31% of the teacher participants did not receive any post-secondary education upon completion of high school. These teachers acquired all special needs knowledge and experiences "on the job". In fact a few of these teachers were unaware that schools for children with special needs existed in Guyana. With much amusement, Baily disclosed,

> When I came here first, I didn't even know such a school, that there was a special school. I was looking for a job and someone told me, a past teacher of the school, she told me. But prior to that I didn't even know that they had a school. I mean there were people that had disabilities, but I didn't know there was an actual school for them.

Caron reiterated,

> Because I got this job from a past teacher from my secondary school and I thought I was going to a nursery school and they said you know what it's a special needs. When I came in the first day, I was like 'have mercy on me!' 'cause I had no clue....

Lack of career path. Policy makers from the Guyana Ministry of Education highlighted the absence of a career path for teachers who wanted to acquire greater specialized training in special needs. Kale stated,

> But the problem is that we don't really have a career path in the ministry for persons with special education training. So that if they wanted to progress professionally...they have to leave the special education field to get a promotion.

Similarly, Jen discussed the absence of a career path for teachers seeking a specialization in special education. She stated, "...one of the problems is that people do not see a career path. Good? People want to know if I get into this field what is the upward social mobility enclosed. And that is blurred at the moment."

Transform attitudes. Furthermore, participants perceived teacher training as an approach to transform teachers' negative attitude toward working with children with special needs. Sandy, a parent of a child with special needs from Region 4 expressed, "They have to learn to get a lot of training, they got to get a lot patience, because the young teachers now they don't have patience...training can help." Policy maker Hilary stated, "We need well detailed teachers training, because trained teachers will also have a lot of interaction doing training with children with special needs...it's important to have that interaction for attitude change." Teachers also considered special needs training as an experience which drastically changed their perceptions toward children with special needs. Pat, a teacher in Region 2, currently attends the special needs mandatory course at the CPCE. She sincerely revealed,

> I have one child in my class...what should I say about him? He has difficulty learning. When you talk to him, he don't look at you, sometimes he would look to the side when you look at him. And he's willing to learn but at first when he just came to my class, I never started in this special needs [referring to the course] as yet. You know, sometimes you just feel like leaving this child all by himself because it just takes so much out of you...But when I started to do this course then I realize something was definitely preventing him from learning. And I work with that child and now he respond to oral language and I talk to him and he would respond and able to write his name and other things...But you see when you don't know anything about it, oh gosh!...Because I personally before I started this course, like I don't know I have just a negative attitude towards [children with special needs], but you know when you get into it and you learn so much things about these children, you become so glad you know.

Andrea, another teacher attending the special needs course stated,

> ...it's inclusive education and I think all teachers should accept that they need to do a little bit more even in the regular school....when all teachers are trained they can better accept that they have a part to play.

Human Resources/Professional Support

Participants also indicated a lack of professional or human resources to support children with special needs within the regular classrooms. Penny explained,

> A teacher with so many other children in the classroom will not have the patience to deal with a child with a disability. You need another support teacher in the classroom. And that's how inclusive education would work, if there is this support for the teacher in the classroom...So you need, and I'm again saying, that support teacher system is needed for inclusive education.

Hilary reflected on her own experiences and revealed,

> Um, I had no systemic supports. It was family, more my mother and grandmother and uncle...'cause I was born without legs before I had prostethis they would hook me on their hip and a wheelchair on one hand and they would take me to school...there were days when the stump is sore [at school] and I have to send someone to call my mom. And she would left whatever she's doing and come over, pull up the chair and push me home. But I couldn't call the principal's office for assistance or a teacher. It was the support of her [mother] or her network of friends or relatives and they did a relatively good job, because none of them had any experience with special needs or children with physical challenges. But they rose to the occasion and they had love to give as well. But systemically there was nothing. There was nothing and there's little now.

Parents of children with special needs who attend a special needs school did not believe inclusive education was possible, due to the lack of in-class support for teachers. Rose stated,

> I think the treatment and the learning he's getting here [special needs school], he would never get it in the primary school [public school]. Because in the primary school there does be like 50-60 children in a class and that teacher would not get the time to sit and learn that one child alone in the class...there is no other help in that class for the teacher.

Baily and Caron, teachers from special needs schools, echoed Rose's statement. Baily emphasized, "And then the classes in the regular school is no less than 30-40 children in the regular schools, and only one teacher per class. Caron continued saying, "And placing the child into the school will be a disadvantage because he wouldn't have the specialized training or the attention that he deserves." Teachers such as Gabiee stated,

> No, I never really have any professional support coming in so far...Mainly we would send for the parents sometimes. You know when he's out of control, you know, and he

> keeps running out of the class and so on, we would send for the parents. But nobody never really came into the school to give us advice on how to deal with him and so on.

Haley, another teacher from a special needs school expressed the need for human resources in order for inclusive education to be successful. She stated,

> First, they need more resource persons to teach the regular children and the special needs children. The teacher who teaching the child with special needs, she needs other resource persons, right. Because um, especially if a child fight. She have to handle the fighting matter...you got to stop what you're doing and listen...so she need a helper.

Speech therapists in Guyana. Participants did acknowledge the support of speech therapists within Guyana. Speech therapists occasionally visited schools to provide advice or assistance for children with language impairments. Hazel, a teacher from Region 2 stated,

> Here we normally would have somebody from the hospital come in to do speech therapy with some of the children...For the term, she said that she would be here on Wednesdays....every Wednesday for one or half an hour.

Jessie, a teacher from another school within Region 2 confirmed this by saying, "Here every Monday afternoon she [speech therapist] would come and she would work with eight students with speech...try for them to speak clearly." Nadine, a parent of a boy with special needs from Region 4 also stated,

> Speech therapy does come every Wednesday at this school...but I only found out from the teacher recently...I does normally carry him every Wednesday morning [to the speech therapist]...but she said 'yeah you don't have to come because they come to this school every Wednesday from downtown'....

However, this support is not consistent across schools or regions within Guyana. As Andrea, a teacher from Region 2 hesitantly stated, "I think there is a speech therapist, they would go to the schools...not all schools, maybe just a specific school because I've never seen one of them...I think the hospital would have therapists, I'm not sure...." Caron and Baily, teachers from Region 6, discussed the inconsistent visits from speech therapists. Caron stated with frustration, "Once in a while there's suppose to [be supports] right, but I don't know for what

reason...they used to come. Some persons used to come...speech therapy." Baily followed by saying, "Speech therapy and the other, they used to come to the school but they don't come when they're suppose to. They don't come on a regular basis. In fact they haven't come for a long, long while."

Volunteers. Speech therapists, as well as any other professional supports (e.g., psychologists, occupational therapists, etc.) are made possible within Guyana because of external volunteer assistance. Andrea explained, "There are many schools and then one speech therapist, it's difficult because they are volunteers." Policy makers, Penny and Hilary further explained the global volunteer support network Guyana has established. Penny stated,

> There are physiotherapists, yes. We have physiotherapists. When it comes to speech therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, whatever, whatever, they always come as volunteers...volunteers...from other countries, yes, from other countries primarily...these areas that you called, those are always volunteers. They come for 2 years or 6 months.

Hilary further clarified the volunteers' length of stay, "2 years until we get another one to come...for 2 years there is a gap. The service is more episodic than continuous." Penny also described the absence of Guyanese professionals who support children with special needs. From her own personal experience she testified,

> My son went to a speech therapist, and I've never seen a Guyanese speech therapist. I have always gone to somebody from Holland, or Canada, or somebody from Britain, or somebody from Germany. I'm telling you, I'm talking about 13 years. I've never seen a Guyanese psych [psychologist]...what are those!? No, never.

Funding and Policies

Participants also identified a lack of funds dedicated toward special education, as well as a lack of national policies for those with special needs within Guyana. Jen, a policy maker within the Ministry of Education stated, "Well, no monies are allocated to the department of

education for SEN [special education needs] or inclusive education, it's for the primary schools, the secondary schools, and the nursery schools...It's money, right...we need financing [for inclusive education]." She suggested that through establishing a SEN unit there would be greater allocation of funds for special education. She expressed,

> Somebody has to budget for SEN. Good. And then when you budget then persons can safely say we need hearing aids, we need large print books, you know all the various things to support children with learning difficulties, right....so it's necessary that a component be designated for SEN so that when schools are making requests, like their shopping list, I need that, I need that and so on, inclusive education or SEN should be a component devoted to a shopping list as well.

Kale, another policy maker within the Ministry of Education, described the current challenge for funding special education. She candidly expressed,

> I fully realize that in order for us to do this [implement inclusive education], be realistic, we need to put a lot more resources into it...the various demands in our resources are many, and it's not that people don't want to put money into special education it's just that the same money is wanted to buy textbooks, to buy computers, to do this and to do that.

However, Penny, a policy maker from the NCD, believed that education for children with special needs is not a priority among educational officers, as this is demonstrated through the allotment of funds toward special education. Penny stated,

> ...it [inclusive education] takes money. Obviously, everything takes money and you need to have money to do whatever it is. You may look it as something that's pretty expensive, but everything you need to do, it has a budget. So, if they would think, if our policy makers would think disability, they would have a budget for this, and then things will happen. How do we get them to think disability!?

Penny then discussed the lack of national policies for those with special needs due to its non-prioritization within the Ministry of Education. She stated, "If within our national policy, there is a focus or even if they put disability as one of the priorities, we may be able to make some headway into having inclusive education in our country." Whitney, a policy maker from the

NCD, discussed the nonchalant approach within the Guyana government in general toward establishing policies for those with special needs. She stated,

> The law for persons with disabilities, the bill to be passed, we've been waiting for a long time for these things to be set into place, and we're still waiting. You know, they tend to always put it on the back burner when they think it's not of very good interest... 'they don't really need that now'....they shift it across. They pay more attention to something that THEY think is more important.

Several teachers also recognized the lack of special education policies for children. Baily stated, "Well, we would definitely need the support of the government...we need policies". Jessie described the importance of modifying policies to make it more equitable for children with special needs. She argued,

> They [educational officers in the Ministry of Education] must be able to think every child is not a high flyer...everybody will work at their own pace. So they have to know that they cannot look forward for schools to always get high grades because sometimes we have these children and our grades will be lower than other schools. So they would have to set policies that would suit the adequate high fliers. They would also have to cater for those children [with special needs] who have never gone to school before now coming because they were kept at home.

Equipment and materials. Teachers related the inadequate amount of funds for special education to the lack of equipment and materials for supporting children with special needs within regular classrooms. Andrea expressed the need for funding to obtain equipment required for inclusive education. She stated, "Funding...funding and facilities or so, they're gonna need a lot of extra things to make life more comfortable for them...to make learning more comfortable for them." Similarly, Jessie discussed,

> I would like to have more aids for these persons with disabilities and the toilet facilities, if they can have for them to use. Where they would be more comfortable using them. Because being that they would have to learn and do work at a slower rate, they need more aids to work along with...I have to make my own aids and things like that, so you would have to get [funds]...especially for some special furniture, special chairs for these children.

When asked about equipment and materials to support the inclusion of children with special needs, Brie, a teacher from Region 2 stated, "No we don't have [equipment and materials], no we don't have...we think you need funding. You have to get funding for these materials." Gabiee also supported this, stating, "Materials...we need lots of materials. And to get that you need to get funds, finances." Policy maker, Kale, also discussed the inability to provide equipment for children with special needs due to lack of funds. She expressed,

> As for us in Guyana, it may be difficult to put equipment into every single school...we'd hope by this year maybe to set up 6 of them [resource rooms within schools]. That has not yet materialized...that will have to roll over into the new plan, because we have not done as well as we have expected [financially].

Parent Support Groups/Parent Training

Parent support groups/parent training was also a resource which participants perceived as necessary for successful inclusive education. Policy maker Whitney described the emotional frustrations and financial challenges of parents who have children with special needs within Guyana. She expressed the benefits of parent support and training,

> ...it's a lot to a parent...lots of questions should be going to the parents like: how do you feel having a child [with special needs]? What are the day to day processes that you have to go through in taking care of a child [with special needs]? And they would tell you everything as long as they will be able to know they can open up to you...it would be beneficial [parental training] because they would be able to know and learn how to cope. They're going through it everyday, but they learn how to better cope. They would know that there are other parents out there that would have to deal with the same situation, so they are not alone. Once they can be able to sit down, one parent will say 'yeah I go through the same thing, I can sympathize with you, I can empathize with what's going on.' You know, it would take a load off their shoulder, that extra pressure that they feel. It would be taken off knowing that somebody else is going through the same thing. They would be able to talk 'How can we better ourselves in being able to deal with these situations?'

Parents such as Gale revealed her desire for more training, and that it is a rare occurrence within Guyana. She stated,

> I think if we get workshops it would be very helpful. But we get workshops once in a blue moon. Sometimes you look on the television you might barely seen an add that they have a workshop at such a place for 2 days. By the time you see it, one day might be already gone. And they do have workshops but it comes so quick and finish so quick. Like if somebody else come from another country, they do a quick workshop and that's it.

A majority of teachers affirmed the need for parental training and support for those with children with special needs. Hazel described the benefits of parental support meetings to mitigate the shame of some parents. She stated,

> I think you have to get the parents, they must have to get some education...because some of them are still ashamed to let you know that they have children with a disability...you could have PTA meetings, you have somebody who knows about special needs, you come and you have a talk, right...you would get a lot parents coming to those meetings, so you will be able to talk to them there...so if you don't tell them about it, that you can bring them out and they can learn...yes, the parents should be educated...important to educate the parents.

Jen, a policy maker, also emphasized that parental education and support groups can serve as a tool to transform parents' perception of their child. It may assist in reducing feelings of embarrassment while increasing their motivation to bring their child to school. She expressed,

> And inclusive education we talk about it, it talks about parents also being not only aware but also educated about learning difficulties and what they can do at home to give that support as well. Because we need to move away from the situation where parent's feel 'well okay my child can't cope and so I need to take my child out of school or keep my child at home or send my child off to some other school' whereas the child can remain right there and derive the full benefits of education.

Penny, a policy maker and parent of a son with special needs described her gratitude for parent support groups. She candidly revealed,

> And when I started in the first instance as a parent I was one to say that my child is not school material, can not go to school then, because that's how I saw it in my head. But because of being a part of a support group, I came to recognize that why you as a parent didn't even try to check out the school systems or the educational systems to see if your child could be a part of school...I'm grateful for that support group that I've joined, this

is what we need. The support group has caused me to make my child get out into society and he's now in school.

Experiences with Children with Special Needs

Participants' experiences with children with special needs were identified as positive or negative, as well as intimate or impersonal in nature. The nature of these experiences influenced the level of advocacy and leadership for children with special needs and inclusion, and also influenced their actions and interactions.

Policy makers from the NCD possessed intimate experiences with children with special needs, because they either have a special need themselves, or have a child with a special need. Through their experiences, these participants developed a sense of advocacy for those with special needs. Hilary, who was born with a special need stated,

> As a professional [in the NCD], being able to see a lot and learn and interact with other people who face similar challenges...and I've been able as a professional and as a volunteer to work with people to try and change some of these perceptions.

Whitney also has a special need, and she described her dedication to creating monthly newsletters catered for those with special needs. She expressed,

> Well, the newsletter is basically for persons with disability. There's different disabled persons organizations here in Guyana. And we would write to these different organizations seeking information on what they have been doing for the past few months before the newsletter comes out...it's very hard work sometimes.

Other policy makers within the Ministry of Education did not have such close encounters with those with special needs. When asked what experiences she had with children with special needs, Kale stated,

> Not on a...not near to me. Not anyone who has been close to me. I mean I just simply been in an organization and interacted with children with special needs. Not on a, you know, long-term or intimate level.

Some teachers discussed negative experiences with children with special needs. These teachers mostly described experiences of children's disruptive and violent behaviours, as well as their inattentiveness. Haley explained,

> And then I had some other challenging students with the mentally retarded, right. I had a boy. When he get into his symptoms he would kind of like cuff up the children...he used to pull down the things, the aids on the walls...he used to kick up the door and so on. I had another child, she, she have this street life, you know. She would like go into rubbish bin and she would pick up all this stuff and she would take it into the corner out there and she set up her stuff....

With frustration, Gabiee expressed,

> ...I does try all strategies to get him settled. Like I would try to give him all sorts of things...I would give him story books, I would give him little colourings to do...and still sometimes it don't work...Right now I'm sure I'm down here [in the interview] he's out of his seat, I'm almost sure.

Other teachers depicted very positive experiences while working with children with special needs. Brie described,

> He [child with special needs] used to look forward to me as being someone to protect him because I knew how to deal with him. Afterwards we were living close to each other...so we communicated a lot...And now that child is in the United States and I learned recently that he's talking now.

Teachers who expressed positive experiences also mentioned intrinsic emotions such as "I love working with them and I gain a lot of satisfaction when I know that the children have learned", or "You have to be careful with them and loving to them. And then you will get the best result from these children." Teachers who reflected on positive experiences frequently stated phrases illustrating advocacy for children with special needs. Phrases such as, "They're human beings just like everybody else. And they deserve the same amount of rights and the same amount of opportunities and so on as the other children...they shouldn't be left out because they have a disability..." or "...they should not be discriminated. They should be treated as a normal person...because they have feelings too."

All parents within this study expressed positive experiences and occurrences with their child with special needs. They shared stories which illuminated their child's independence, intelligence, and creativity. These parents also frequently commented on their child's right to an education and the right to be treated just as any other child.

What is Currently Happening in Guyana to Support Children with Special Needs?

Amidst these factors of implementing inclusive education within Guyana, there are attempts to address and support children with special needs:

Special Education Schools and Centres

Currently, there are approximately nine institutions which support the educational and rehabilitative needs for children with special needs in Guyana (UNICEF, 2000). Many of these facilities are located within the urban areas of Guyana. As a result, children with special needs residing in rural and interior regions of Guyana are not supported.

The Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR)

Through enlisting participation from parents, families, and community volunteers, the CBR utilizes a grassroots approach to providing awareness, support, and rehabilitation services for those with special needs (UNICEF, 2000). The CBR emphasizes knowledge, training, inclusion into society, empowerment, and improvement of rights for those with special needs (VSO Guyana, 2005). The CBR program is currently implemented across 9 of the 10 regions within Guyana (UNICEF, 2000).

The Guyana Ministry of Education Strategic Plan

The government of Guyana has attempted to acknowledge the educational rights and requirements for children with special needs (UNICEF, 2000). The *Education Policy and Five-Year Development Plan for Guyana* in 1995 expressed governmental commitment to "providing equal access to quality education to all Guyanese children and young people" (Ministry of

Education and Cultural Development Guyana, 1995, p. 27). The plan listed policy proposals to promote the educational rights of children with special needs. However, it does not mention inclusion of children with special needs, nor does it explicitly state how to achieve the proposed policies. *The Strategic Plan 2003-2007* reaffirms the pledge to equally provide quality education to all Guyanese children. It further indicates the free compulsory nature of formal education for children ages 5 to 15 years old (Government of Guyana, 2003). It also highlights the challenge "to accelerate the mainstreaming/inclusion of persons with special needs into the education system" (Government of Guyana, 2003, p. 14). This challenge is considered an equity issue that must be managed. The 5 year plan also lists strategies to accomplish better inclusion for children with special needs within the education system (i.e., 2003-2007).

Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE)-Special education module

Guyana has made attempts to include children with special needs within the regular schools through the introduction of a mandatory special education course at the teacher's college. This is a basic course for students at CPCE to increase familiarity and awareness of special needs within the classroom. However, participants still perceived this module as insufficient in fully preparing teachers with specific skills and knowledge to modify curricula and manage behaviours. Nevertheless, teachers currently in the CPCE program expressed transformations of previous negative attitudes toward a more accepting and positive attitude in working with children with special needs.

The National Commission on Disability (NCD)

Established in 1997, this government appointed organization promotes the rights of those with special needs, as well as implements equal opportunity programs (VSO Guyana, 2005). This group provides advice and suggestions to the government concerning areas of special needs, while examining and assessing policies and programs (VSO Guyana, 2005).

Guyana Ministry of Health

A majority of interventions for those with special needs is supported by this government body (VSO Guyana, 2005). For example the Guyana Ministry of Health is responsible for the National Rehabilitative Service which provides training and education in physiotherapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy (UNICEF, 2000; VSO Guyana, 2005). It is expected that those completing the 18 month program will reside in Guyana and help fill the void of professionals for those with special needs (UNICEF, 2000). With the cooperation of the Commonwealth Society for the Deaf, the Guyana Ministry of Health has also developed the Audiological Services in Guyana (UNICEF, 2000). This has allowed for one Guyanese doctor and other technicians to travel to the United Kingdom in order to receive Audiology training. Additionally, British Audiologists travel to Guyana to train those within the public hospitals (UNICEF, 2000).

Ruimveldt Parent Support Group

This organization supports parents of children with special needs (VSO Guyana, 2005). These parents share knowledge, information, and encouragement, while publicly promoting awareness pertaining to special needs (UNICEF, 2000). The group also serves to empower and validate the rights of children and youth with special needs and their families. However, this organization is located within only one area of Guayna; Ruimveldt, a village within the capital city of Georgetown. As participants expressed, there is a need for more groups that support parents of children with special needs throughout Guyana.

UNICEF Guyana

Within the 2007 annual work plan, UNICEF Guyana has established a project to improve the quality of basic education and gender equality for children in Guyana. Within this project, UNICEF Guyana has placed a focus on screening and referring all school children for special

needs throughout seven regions within Guyana (UNICEF Guyana, personal communications, December 1, 2006). Another focus for 2007, is sensitizing teachers and parents about special needs and inclusion (UNICEF Guyana, personal communications, December 1, 2006)

Community Activities

Guyana has implemented certain community activities to promote the rights and generate awareness for those with special needs. One of these activities is the Guyana Mini Olympics and Project Committee. This NGO committee is co-sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). It supports sports activities for children with special needs, while also generating awareness and providing training in areas such as "advocacy and leadership" (UNICEF, 2000, p. 47). Participants reported events such as devoting one educational awareness month to special educational needs. During this month, the Guyana Ministry of Education held award ceremonies to recognize academic accomplishments among children with special needs. Jen, a policy maker stated,

> ...last year, education month was devoted to SEN. In the sense that the theme was special education valuing the uniqueness and dignity of the child. And so we did quite a number of things. Like we had the award ceremony.

These events validate children with special needs, and also create an awareness of special needs within the Guyanese community.

Discussion

This study explored inclusive education for children with special needs (ages 0-8 years old) within Guyana from the perspectives of policy makers, teachers, and parents of children with special needs. Throughout this investigation, four particular factors have been identified as impacting inclusive education within Guyana: 1) attitudes/perception toward those with special needs, 2) change agents, 3) resources, and 4) experiences with children with special needs. Also discussed are the strategies and consequences which resulted from the relationship between these factors. The findings assist in developing an explanation to support inclusive education within Guyana.

Attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs is highlighted as the core obstacle preventing successful inclusive education within Guyana. These findings are congruent with Groenewegen (2004) and Mitchell (2005), which report continuous stigmatization and discrimination toward those with special needs in Guyana. Groenewegen (2004) and Mitchell (2005) also report frequent teacher resistance within Guyana toward including a child with special needs within the regular classroom. These prejudices often affect the self-esteem of Guyanese individuals with special needs, and discourage them from freely participating within society (Mitchell, 2005). Participants in this study emphasized that Guyanese society perceived those with special needs as a burden and liability to their families and to society. The belief that a child with special needs is a dependent liability are perhaps embedded within an underlying assumption that those with special needs can not contribute to the economic development of the family or the country (i.e., financially or execute chores and duties which typically parents would pay for).

Mallory (1993) suggests that children within developing countries participate in the economic development for parents and families in which "resources flow from children to their

elders" (p. 3). Within developing countries, the child maintains an "instrumental" role by performing essential tasks or chores at no cost to parents (e.g., childcare, house cleaning, farming/food production, etc.), or earning money for the family (Mallory, 1993). Guyanese children with special needs are perceived incapable of accomplishing this role in comparison to the contribution of children without special needs. Therefore, a child with special needs becomes a continuous familial responsibility or burden.

The negative attitudes toward those with special needs are apparent throughout Guyanese society. The prejudice toward those with special needs is often learned through the family and culture, and becomes sustained through generational effects (Oskamp, 1991). For example, a Guyanese child without special needs will learn the negative attitudes of their parents who frequently tease and mock those with special needs. This child without special needs may now maintain these prejudices, and most likely will convey these negative attitudes to his/her own child. In addition, there is often group pressure to conform to the predominant cultural views (Oskamp, 1991). This is especially true within a developing country like Guyana where minimal knowledge and education exist pertaining to special needs. Many Guyanese citizens are uninformed and unaware of issues regarding special needs. Consequently, Guyanese citizens conform to the predominant cultural belief toward those with special needs, even if it is negative. Perhaps these negative attitudes are a form of cultural truisms: societal beliefs which are assumed to be valid and are rarely questioned (Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991). Guyanese society assume these negative beliefs are valid, because they are culturally embedded, there is a lack of awareness and accurate knowledge pertaining to special needs, and these attitudes continue to be passed down from generation to generation.

The negative attitude toward those with special needs is associated with the absence of change agents within Guyana to support inclusive education. There are no change agents who

are leaders and advocates for inclusion within Guyana. The condition of not having adequate resources to support inclusive education is also related to the negative attitudes toward those with special needs within Guyana. Currently, there are not enough resources available to meet the educational requirements for children with special needs in Guyana (Mitchell, 2005). According to the *Situational Analysis of Children with Disabilities in the Caribbean*, Guyana maintains challenges in accessing human resources, obtaining sufficient funds, space, and materials, as well as implementing adequate amounts of special education courses and training for teachers (UNICEF, 2000). Groenewegen (2004) and Mitchell (2005) affirm the insufficient amount of facilities and buildings within Guyana to accommodate for children with special needs, as well as the prevalence of unqualified teachers instructing children with special needs. This challenge is faced by many developing countries which lack simple educational materials, adequate equipment and facilities, required to achieve meaningful inclusion (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002).

Participants perceived the absence of appropriate equipment and materials to a lack of funding. All participants acknowledged insufficient funds allocated toward special education within Guyana. Regardless of the insufficient funds, policy makers within the Guyana Ministry of Education justify spending available funds toward other educational areas (e.g., textbooks, computers). There is an inappropriate funding structure within the Ministry of Education which does not allow it to financially provide for special educational services. This may be due to existing political and economic turmoil experienced by many developing countries (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). Nevertheless, it demonstrates the lack of prioritization and budgeting for education of children with special needs in Guyana. As Penny pleaded, "...if our policy makers would think disability, they would have a budget for this, and then things will happen. How do we get them to think disability!?"

Participants' experiences with children with special needs is also a condition related to the negative attitude toward those with special needs. Teachers and policy makers who reflect on positive or intimate experiences of working with children with special needs maintain a specific moral purpose toward educating, advocating, and caring for children; they are more likely to accept a child with special needs within their classroom. Teachers who reflect on negative experiences and maintain negative perceptions of children with special needs, are more likely to refer them to a special needs school. However, even if Guyanese teachers maintain a more positive and accepting attitude toward children with special needs, inclusion is still perceived as difficult due to the absence of adequate resources and training (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

The findings within this study suggest that there is an association between the core phenomenon (i.e., attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs) and the other existing conditions (i.e., change agents, resources, and experiences with children with special needs). The attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs influence the quality and existence of change agents, resources, and experiences with children with special needs. If positive attitudes become the predominant societal attitude toward those with special needs, this will impact the support for children with special needs and inclusion, including establishing inclusive education change agents, greater allocation of resources for special education, and policy development for those with special needs. However, these three conditions can also ameliorate the effects of attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs. The interrelationship between the core category and the other conditions impacts certain strategies employed, and the consequences resulting from these strategies.

From participants' accounts, the strategy taken by those in the Ministry of Education is to not prioritize special education. As previously discussed, participants highlighted this

inadequate prioritization for special education within the Ministry of Education. Those at the top level of government are aware of the current situation and issues surrounding special education and inclusion for children with special needs, yet there are no change agents knowledgeable in areas of inclusion who can stimulate inclusive education reform within Guyana. As a result, those within the Ministry of Education do not prioritize special education, provide sufficient resources, develop policies, or create a unit for special education. A common strategy among teachers within regular schools is to frequently refer parents of children with special needs to the special needs schools. This was reported by many parents and teachers within this study. The strategy among parents of children without special needs, is to discourage their own child from socializing and interacting with children with special needs. This was observed and experienced by all parents within this study. Considering the negative attitude surrounding those with special needs in Guyana, it is not surprising that parents of children with special needs develop a sense of shame, fear, and denial. As a result, the strategy used among this group of parents is to hide or remove their child from society and to withdraw from communicating with other parents who do have children with special needs.

The findings indicate three consequences from using these strategies. One consequence is that negative societal attitudes toward those with special needs continue to propagate throughout Guyana. Ministries within the government do not provide adequate knowledge, awareness, resources, support, and advocacy for children with special needs. This also leads to teachers and parents not gaining support and training within areas of special education.

Another consequence is that children with special needs are removed and concealed from both the community and the schools. Many parents of children with special needs conceal their children from society due to the surrounding negative attitudes from Guyanese society, the medical community, and other parents and teachers. These children are hidden and removed

from society (Groenewegen, 2004). The stigmatization toward children with special needs fuels feelings of shame, fear, and denial among parents. These feelings deprive parents from freely exposing their child within society, and allowing them to equally participate within the Guyanese community (Mitchell, 2005). Children with special needs are kept from fairly participating within their community and exercising their right to an education.

The final consequence is that educational reform toward a more inclusive system does not exist within Guyana. The phenomenon of persisting negative attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs and varying conditions instigates strategies and actions, which consequently results in no established inclusive education system. A combination of strategies may contribute to the stagnant educational reform toward inclusion. This includes non-prioritization of special education, parents hiding their child with special needs from society, teachers within regular schools deterring parents from sending their child to the regular schools, and parents of children without special needs discouraging their child from socializing with those with special needs.

Reforming attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs is pertinent to reforming the educational system within Guyana. Transforming beliefs toward inclusion requires an understanding and awareness of special needs and the principles of inclusion. Guyanese society must challenge its predominant culturally embedded negative attitude toward those with special needs in order to instigate long-lasting educational reform. Teachers must reflect upon their personal moral purpose to reaffirm and support their attitudes toward inclusion (Fullan, 2003; Layton, 2005). Successful inclusion is driven by the moral purposes of educators in generating a commitment to include all children within regular classrooms, despite abilities. Within this study, few teacher participants within regular schools maintained positive experiences and perspectives toward children with special needs in their classroom. They expressed feelings of

enjoyment and satisfaction for teaching children with special needs. These positive attitudes and beliefs are vital components in establishing inclusive education (Smith & Leonard, 2005).

Knowledgeable agents of change who are familiar with inclusion is essential to implementing inclusive education (Frankel & McKay, 1997). The change agent may serve as a source of support, as well as assist in complex emotions, relationships, and conflicts which may arise (Frankel & McKay, 1997, p. 69). As motivators and initiators of inclusion, change agents can disseminate principles of inclusion throughout the educational systems of Guyana.

Participants referenced the importance of the "top level" in demonstrating interest, support, and prioritization for inclusion of children with special needs within the education system of Guyana. Guyanese educational officials must assume positive power as an inclusive leader and serve as an example to Guyanese society, teachers, and parents (Hargreaves, 2004). Educational officials within the Ministry of Education must be collaborative leaders focused on educating all children (Fullan, 2001). Although change may be activated from a top down level, it must be a collaborative process in order for the educational reform to be successful and meaningful. The involvement, participation, and perspectives of diverse members involved within the change process must be included (Frankel, 2006; Frankel & McKay, 1997; Hunt et al., 2004). Implementing an inclusive education reform incorporates members such as officials from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, principals/directors, teachers, and parents. These members may exchange ideas, knowledge, experiences, and goals in order to achieve inclusive education within Guyana (Hunt et al., 2004). Furthermore, these change agents from the top level may positively influence and transform attitudes toward those with special needs. Particularly among teachers within the regular schools of Guyana who require leaders that serve as role models of inclusion, declaring advocacy and equal educational rights for children with special needs (Irwin et al., 2004).

Inclusive education reform may also be initiated from a bottom up level. Parents of children with special needs can serve as powerful and passionate advocates for children with special needs and inclusion. Parent support groups provide parents of children with special needs with courage, confidence, and moral support required to promote principles of inclusion. These groups also become a community where parents reveal concerns, feel acceptance free from judgment, and rely on the experiences of other members (Kramer, 1993). Parental support groups provide emotional support, information/education, socialization, advocacy, and guidance through personal experiences (Pooley & Goetz, 1992). Parents within this study confirmed such benefits from the few parent support groups which currently exist in Guyana. However, it is evident that Guyana requires more parental support groups.

Educating Guyanese parents about special needs will foster a sense of awareness and empowerment in coping with their child. Vacca (2001) asserts that parent training boosts the self-confidence of parents, allowing them to understand what they are doing well and what they may need to change. Parent training is an opportunity to encourage parents during times of frustration (Vacca, 2001). It may also allow Guyanese parents to positively perceive their child and reduce feelings of shame; thus, no longer hiding their child from the community and schools.

Policy development occurs throughout the change process (Frankel & MacKay, 1997). Frankel and MacKay (1997) suggest that clearly constructed policies and procedures provide individuals involved in the change process with the certainty to implement and sustain the change. Once effective change agents initiate a change toward inclusive education for children with special needs within Guyana, policy development and establishment will emerge during this process. This will support sustainable inclusive education in Guyana.

Providing Guyanese teachers within regular schools with sufficient training, human resources, and equipment/materials necessary to include children with special needs may

enhance their confidence. Teachers may feel more secure in their knowledge and abilities to manage children with special needs, as well as feel supported by other professionals and the government. Congruent with studies by Rose (2001) and Vaughn and Schumm (1995), Guyanese teachers do not feel adequately competent and qualified to include children with special needs within the regular classrooms. Similar to research conducted by Vaughn and Schumm (1995), teachers within Guyana accounted for the desire to receive more knowledge and training in order to better teach, accommodate the environment, and modify the curricula to include children with special needs. The additional resources will enhance the teaching efficacy and personal efficacy among Guyanese teachers, allowing them to be more receptive toward inclusion (Soodak et al., 1998).

Most developing countries do not cater for programs that educate and train professional supports at higher education institutions (e.g., university or college) (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002). However, including professional resources often ensures for successful inclusion (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). Examples of human resources include, but are not limited to, teacher assistants, resource teachers, psychologists, speech and language pathologists, counselors, social workers, occupational therapists, behavioural therapists, etc. These professional supports will "assist in identification, referral, diagnosis, treatment, and provision of appropriate educational and related services" (Eleweke & Rodda, 2002, p. 117). Such professional supports will collaboratively provide Guyanese teachers with knowledge and assistance in order to achieve inclusion for children with special needs (Crawford, 2004).

In order to support educational reform toward inclusion in Guyana, societal attitudes must improve, change agents and resources must be accessed, and those working with children with special needs should maintain positive and intimate experiences. It is also necessary to consider the sociopolitical factors (i.e., social, economic, cultural, legal, and political) which

operate as societal barriers oppressing those with special needs within Guyana (Turmusani, 2003). Guyanese society has the obligation to prioritize and provide for children with special needs, who equally maintain rights to participate within all aspects of their community and regular schools. However, questions remain concerning what Guyanese people must now do to understand and confront existing societal barriers toward those with special needs, and how overcoming these barriers will support inclusive education reform within Guyana?

Limitations and Future Research

Sampling. The sample of selected participants and regions were not randomly selected due to limitations such as time, duration of stay, and unfamiliarity with the country. Through collaboration with other organizations, participants and regions were conveniently, purposefully, and theoretically selected. Another limit is sample size, as it consisted of 22 participants. The sample size and regions greatly varied among each group of participants. In addition, only female perspectives are represented within this study.

Data collection. The focus group interviews posed challenges in managing and mediating discussions. At times it became difficult to differentiate between voices when transcribing audio tapes. However, maintaining observational field notes, as well as ensuring participants clearly stated names before speaking in the interviews, controlled for this limitation. Also, regardless of attempts to report on complete verbatim responses from participants within both the individual interviews and focus group interviews, there may have been issues surrounding interviewer effects (e.g., interviewer's expectations or personal attributes [i.e., ethnicity, gender] may influence participants' responses; participants may provide responses to please or agree with interviewer's expectations) (Judd, Smith, & Kidder, 1991).

Future research. It is beneficial to explore the government of Guyana's stance toward the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Currently, Guyana is

listed as a signatory country, but has not yet established it as a law within the country. Comparative studies may also be conducted between Guyana and other developing countries which are attempting to implement inclusive education. Examining successful implementation of inclusive education within other developing countries will assist Guyana in such educational reform. Furthermore, it is essential to continue investigating approaches of transforming attitudes and beliefs toward those with special needs amidst the existing sociopolitical climate within Guyana.

Recommendations

It is recognized that each Guyanese child with special needs must have an equal opportunity to fully participate in society and access education. Within Guyana, marginalization and discrimination against this group of children and their families continue to perpetuate. Those in power must acknowledge the unequal educational opportunities for children with special needs, and attempt to understand the social, historical, and cultural contexts which continue to oppress Guyanese children with special needs (Angelides, Stylianou, & Gibbs, 2006). Guyana must establish and implement policies and practices for children with special needs in order to overcome the existing barriers.

In this study it is apparent that the predominant negative attitude toward those with special needs is the fundamental barrier of implementing inclusive education within Guyana. Guyanese society must receive education, knowledge, and sensitization regarding special needs. Various organizations throughout Guyana have made attempts to generate awareness and promote rights for those with special needs (e.g., NCD, CBR, UNICEF Guyana, Ruimveldt parent support group, etc.). Attempts have also been made by the Guyana Ministry of Health in providing rehabilitation training and education for those with special needs. The Guyana Ministry of Education has also endeavored to include the educational rights for children with special needs within the strategic plans. However, this established general plan must be clearly implemented and practiced within Guyana.

The Guyana Ministry of Education and/or other government sectors must promote positive public awareness of inclusive education and its benefits for children with special needs. This may be done throughout the school systems or within the media (e.g., television, print, radio). Also, holding community meetings and workshops where community members, parents, teachers, and professionals discuss the benefits of inclusive education and the challenges of

implementing it. Generating public discussion and awareness of inclusive education will promote a greater attitude of acceptance for children with special needs in Guyana. In order to transform societal attitudes toward children with special needs, people must become aware and educated about special needs, disabilities, and inclusion.

Another approach to mitigating these negative societal attitudes is to access change agents who are experienced and knowledgeable in areas of special education and inclusion. These agents will capably stimulate educational reform toward inclusion within Guyana. Participants believed that change agents should reside at the top level of government (i.e., Ministry of Education) in order for positive attitudes of this change to trickle down into the schools and society. As participants revealed, there are currently no change agents for inclusive education at the government level within Guyana. Therefore, it may be beneficial for the Guyana Ministry of Education to target and sponsor prominent individuals well-versed in the field of inclusive education in order to serve as change agents (Irwin et al., 2004a). These individuals may then support, educate, share strategies and best practices, as well as prepare those willing to take on the responsibility of an inclusive education change agent within the Guyana Ministry of Education.

Change agents within the Ministry of Education can also generate policies and laws to broadly support those with special needs and inclusive education. Legislative change must support the rights of children with special needs and their families. The policies and laws should clearly stipulate that children with special needs should freely access the regular education system, and be provided with instructional support and assistance if necessary (Stough, 2003). The Guyana Ministry of Education must also revise its current definitions and categories of special education for children with special needs. Currently, within Guyana, the *Draft Education Bill, 1998: The Regulations* concentrates on the child's disabilities and deficiencies, rather than

on their right to receive an education that is accommodated and modified to meet their needs (Stough, 2003).

Change agents will prioritize and commit to improving the educational opportunities for children with special needs. They will justly attempt to allocate funds toward special education. Stough (2003) suggests that the absence of military forces is profitable for developing countries, as the government is better able to allocate a great deal of the national budget toward education. Arias asserts,

> It is my strong belief that military spending represents the single most significant perversion of worldwide priorities known today...And yet, instead of investing in the health and education of their people, poor countries continue to supply them, all in the name of "national security". Ask any child on the streets of India, Burundi, or Myanmar whether she would rather have bread to eat and a school to go to or a fighter jet to protect her, and you will have the obvious answer that national security means nothing in the absence of human security. (as cited in Stough, 2003, p. 14).

Historically, the government of Guyana has been perceived as allocating funds toward political parties, military, paramilitary, and the police as a means to secure "political loyalty" (Samaroo, 1990, p. 12). Samaroo (1990) also suggests that the government of Guyana has historically substituted academic schooling with programs such as military training as a means to proliferate governmental propaganda. This is not to suggest that the current Guyana government solely budgets for its military and defense forces while neglecting its educational sector. In fact, since elected into office in 1992, President Bharrat Jagdeo has recognized the importance of dedicating more funds toward the education sectors. It has been suggested that 20% of the 2005 Guyana national budget was distributed to the education department (i.e., approximately $14-15 billion dollars) (Guyana Government Information Agency, 2005; Office of the President-Guyana, 2005). Presently, the distribution of funds toward education in Guyana is roughly the same as in 2005, "The 2007 national budget allocated $15.6B to the (educational) sector"

(Guyana Government Information Agency, 2005, para. 9). The recent allotment of funds for the education sector is a great improvement from previous years, where for example in 1992 only 4.4% of the national budget was dedicated toward the educational sectors (Ministry of Education: Information Source of Guyana, 2003). Nonetheless, Guyana is a developing country which is economically struggling, and it must reconsider and reshuffle its finances (e.g., military and defense forces) in order to specifically support and prioritize educational equity and development for children with special needs.

With regards to teacher training, it is positive that a mandatory special education course has been implemented at CPCE. However, this course is only introductory in nature. It would be beneficial to specifically train teachers how to modify the curricula and student's achievements in order to include a child with special needs. Perhaps it may be required to implement a teacher training course entitled "Inclusive Education", where ideologies and principles of inclusion are discussed. Yet again, this requires the support and commitment of the Ministry of Education to ensure that relevant courses, workshops, and conferences are available and affordable for those working with children with special needs (Irwin et al., 2004a).

The universities and colleges within Guyana must provide training and education of specific professional supports for children with special needs. These higher education institutions must implement courses and offer degrees or diplomas for those desiring a career path in psychology, speech pathology, early childhood education, occupational therapy, behavioural therapy, or consulting. Each of these professions supports inclusion for children with special needs (e.g., diagnosis, rehabilitative programs, classroom assistance, etc.).

Having supports assist children with special needs within the regular classroom will alleviate additional classroom stress, and allow teachers to concentrate on instructing other students. Once individuals are trained within the aforementioned professions to support children

with special needs, they may then build a team comprised of these professional supports. This team may be responsible for the educational services and progress of children with special needs within Guyana. Hall and Figueroa (1998) suggest implementing a "carousel model", where this team of professionals provides in-class support for children with special needs within the regular classrooms. The groups of specialists may rotate weekly among various schools within the country (Hall & Figueroa, 1998). They may also serve to train and promote educational awareness for children with special needs.

It is also recommended that more parental support groups be established for those with children with special needs. This includes allocating funds toward such groups in order to provide parents with the means to serve as justified advocates for children with special needs and inclusion. Parental support groups are also a vehicle for transforming the stifled feelings of shame, humiliation, and disgrace experienced by many families of children with special needs. These support groups benefit not only the parents, but also the child; it provides parents with the courage and freedom to allow their child to be liberated into society, participate within the community, and attend school.

Conclusions

Through accessing the perspectives of various Guyanese policy makers, teachers, and parents of children with special needs, four factors which are potential barriers to implementing inclusive education within Guyana were identified. In addition, a theory was developed grounded in the perspectives of participants in order to explain the interrelationship among these factors, as well as possible strategies and consequences. The present study draws attention to current conditions which may be targeted to assist in the implementation and support of inclusive education within Guyana.

Change agents for inclusive education, resources, and the intervening nature of past or present experiences with children with special needs may collectively influence the sustained societal attitudes toward those with special needs. Although, it may also be that the societal attitudes toward those with special needs impacts the quality and presence of change agents, resources, and experiences with children with special needs. A mutual relationship exists among the core phenomenon and the other conditions. However, this relationship prompts various strategies among Guyanese policy makers, teachers, and parents of children with or without special needs. These strategies lead to potential consequences.

Participants highlighted the predominant negative societal attitudes/perceptions toward those with special needs within Guyana; this was emphasized as the greatest obstacle to implementing inclusive education within Guyana. Other conditions included an absence of change agents, inadequate resources, and impersonal and/or negative experiences with children with special needs. Due to the relationship between these conditions, strategies have been employed, which consequently continue to suppress the educational rights and value of children with special needs.

In order to support inclusive education within Guyana, it is necessary to transform the prevalent societal attitude toward a more accepting and tolerant country. Those with special needs must be perceived as active and contributing citizens, who possess the right to participate within all elements of Guyanese society. Inclusion must become a central common practice within Guyana. Regardless of abilities, all Guyanese people must be viewed as having equal access to all aspects of society (e.g., employment, educational, social, medical, etc.). The government of Guyana and the Ministry of Education must actively be involved in creating infrastructures conducive for inclusive education. This may be accomplished by establishing clear policies and legislation for those with special needs and inclusive education, allocating funds toward inclusive education, and prioritizing matters of special education. Teachers, principals, and parents also have a responsibility in practicing inclusion within the schools, as well as maintaining a positive attitude toward those with special needs. As Fullan (2001) states, "changes in beliefs and understanding...are the foundation of achieving lasting reform" (p. 45). Therefore, citizens of Guyana must revise their beliefs, perceptions, and mind-set toward special needs and disability in order for a successful and sustainable inclusive education reform.

Table 1

Participants and Regions Included within this Study

Number of participants (*N=22)*			
Region	Policy maker	Teachers	Parents of children with special needs
2	0	10	0
4	5	0	3
6	0	3	1

Appendix A

Guyana Flyer for Recruitment

INCLUSION FOR SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN IN OUR SCHOOLS

You are invited to discuss and explore inclusive education for children (ages 0-8 years) with special needs in Guyana with a Canadian researcher. The discussions will take place in a group session and should take no longer than two hours to complete. All of our discussions will remain CONFIDENTIAL in nature and real names WILL NOT be used in any reports.

Refreshments will be served.

Your perspectives, ideas, and experiences are a valuable source of information- Please come and share them with us.

*FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT UNICEF GUYANA (insert phone number and contact name)

This project is supported by Ryerson University and is in collaboration with UNICEF Guyana.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol (Policy Makers & Teachers)

ICE BREAKER (POLICY MAKER):

a) Introduce myself and thank you
b) Explain the purpose of research
c) Obtain Consent (remind them about audio taping & observational note taking)
d) Assure confidentiality
e) Invite questions and clarifications from the participants

ICE BREAKER (TEACHER FOCUS GROUP):

Adhere to the Focus Group Guide

---

1) Tell me about your background in education

Probes:

a) How long have you been a Policy Maker/Teacher
b) Educational background

2) Tell me about your experiences with children with special needs in schools

Probes:

a) Your role or involvement
b) Support systems, resources, and training
c) Collaboration or teamwork among staff members, parents, directors, etc.
d) Challenges faced in working with children with special needs.
e) Feelings regarding children with special needs
f) Attitudes or cultural views

3) Tell me about your understanding of inclusive education.

Probes:

a) Feelings regarding inclusive education
b) Concerns about inclusive education

4) Concerns/issues to overcome when implementing inclusive education policies & practices in Guyana

Probes:

a) Funds/finances
b) Training or resources
c) Professional supports (e.g., Psychologists, Speech & Language Pathologist, etc.)
d) Communication
e) Equipment and materials
f) Attitudes

5) What supports would you need to make inclusion work for you/in the schools?

Probes:

a) Teachers (when interviewing teachers)
b) Funds/finances
c) Training or resources
d) Professional supports (e.g., Psychologists, Speech & Language Pathologist, etc.)
e) Communication
f) Equipment and materials
g) Attitudes
h) Policies

6) How do you think having policies and practices where children with special needs are a part of the regular classrooms would affect:

a) You the parents
b) The organization/schools
c) The children
d) The teachers
e) Guyana

7) From what you know, where is Guyana in terms of developing and implementing inclusive education policies?

MEMBER CHECK-IN
CLOSING STATEMENTS

Appendix C

Interview Protocol (Parents)

ICE BREAKER (PARENT FOCUS GROUP):

Adhere to the Focus Group Guide

---

1) Tell me about your family and children

Probes:

a) Age
b) Special Need
c) Grade level

2) What have been your experiences with schools and your child with special needs

Probes:

a) Attitudes & Acceptance
b) Supports & Resources
c) Training

Define inclusive education for group of parents

-"Inclusive education is an educational system that allows children with disabilities or special needs to be included within regular schools and classrooms with other children who DO NOT have disabilities or special needs. This means children with disabilities will receive the same education in the same classroom as children without disabilities. If the child with disabilities needs help or assistance in the classroom, someone (e.g., assistant or therapist) will come into the classroom and help the child...the child is never pulled-out of the classroom".

3) Tell me what you think about inclusive education for your children

Probes:

a) Feelings regarding inclusive education
b) Concerns about inclusive education

4) Concerns/issues to overcome when implementing inclusive education policies & practices in Guyana

Probes:

a) Funds/finances
b) Training or resources
c) Professional supports (e.g., Psychologists, Speech & Language Pathologist, etc.)
d) Communication
e) Equipment and materials
f) Attitudes

5) What supports or assistance do you think are needed for inclusion of special needs children within the schools?

Probes:

a) Parents
b) Funds/finances
c) Training or resources
d) Professional supports (e.g., Psychologists, Speech & Language Pathologist, etc.)
e) Communication
f) Equipment and materials
g) Attitudes
h) Policies

6) How do you think having policies and practices where children with special needs are a part of the regular classrooms would affect:

a) You the parents
b) The organization/schools
c) The children
d) The teachers
e) Guyana

7) From what you know, where is Guyana in terms of developing and implementing inclusive education policies?

MEMBER CHECK-IN
CLOSING STATEMENTS

Appendix D

Focus Group Guide/Script
Adapted from Vaughn, Schumm, and Sinagub (1996) and Bogden and Biklen (2003)

- WELCOME:

"Welcome and thank you for coming out to attend this focus group for teachers/parents. Please feel free to help yourself to some drinks and snacks. Your points of views and opinions are quite important and valuable to us, so thank you for your desire to share them with us. We understand that you are very busy and we greatly appreciate your contribution to this project". HAVE EVERYONE FILL OUT NAME CARDS

- INTRODUCTION:

"My name is Amanda and this is my assistant Maggie. We have travelled here from Toronto, Canada. I am a Masters student in Early Childhood Studies at Ryerson University and Maggie is just finishing up her Bachelors degree at Ryerson in Early Childhood Education. My family is originally from Guyana, and this is what urged me to come back to the country where my parents are from and see what is happening for children with disabilities in the educational system. This project I am doing in Guyana will be for my Master's Research Paper and it will also help to support programs at UNICEF Guyana, and perhaps the Ministry of Education, Guyana".

- PURPOSE:

"The purpose of this study is to explore the different opinion and views of policy makers, teachers, and parents who have children with special needs (ages 0-8 years old) about the topic of inclusive education. I would like to examine the barriers within Guyana of implementing inclusive education policies and practices. This is important so that it may allow for a more inclusive society for children with special needs. It may also help assist in an educational reform which includes children with special needs. Many of the questions within this focus group will focus on your emotions, experiences, and concerns, with inclusive education for children with disabilities".

- CONSENT:

"At this time, I would like to ask if everyone is still wanting to participate in this focus group? If so, these are consent forms which are for your legal protection in being in this study. We will read through it together, and you can ask questions, then you will need to sign and date it". DISTRIBUTE CONSENT FORMS

GATHER CONSENT FORMS AND DISTRIBUTE PROMISE OF CONFIDENTIALITY FORM—" This form is to just remind everyone that even though I promise to keep everything confidential, other members within this focus group should do so as well. So, this means not discussing topics or issues with others outside of this focus group once it is over.

- GUIDELINES:

"This focus group and the interview questions is not a test, and there are no right or wrong answers. Remember we are very interested in what you think and feel. We want to know

your opinions on these issues. You shouldn't feel that you have to agree with everyone else within this room, if that is not how you truly feel. We expect that everyone will have different opinions, and it is important that we learn about all of the views represented here. But if you do agree, please share those views. Please feel comfortable to say good things as well as critical or negative things, as I just want to understand your opinions regarding inclusive education. Also, you do not need to speak in any order, just speak when you feel you want to. But, please do not speak when someone else is speaking so we can be sure we are getting everyone's opinions on tape. Also, because our time is limited, I may need to stop you or redirect our discussion. Lastly, when you say something it would be very helpful if you say your first name so we will know who is speaking when we listen to the tape".

- CONFIDENTIAILITY:

" I just want to repeat that everything mentioned within this focus group will remain confidential by myself. I will assure you of the strictest of confidentiality. No names will be used to identify anyone in the final paper...only title will be used. For example, 'Teacher 1 from _____'".

- QUESTIONS:

"Does anyone have any questions they would like to ask before we begin?"

- WARM UP: (get out interview protocol)

HAVE PARTICIPANTS TELL YOU ABOUT THEMSELVES –NAMES FIRST.
QUESTION 1 ON INTERIVEW PROTOCOL IS LIKE A WARM-UP

GO THROUGH INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

- MEMBER CHECK:

"Let me just identify some key points which surfaced through our discussion, and just tell me how you feel about it...verify whether or not you agree with these points, if you think they are accurate and fair. I'm not looking for a discussion, just a general idea of how many of you feel a particular way". QUICKLY GO THROUGH ALL PARTICIPANTS AND SEE HOW THEY FEEL ABOUT MAJOR POINTS.

- CLOSING STATEMENTS:

"As we come to a close, I just want to remind everyone that the audio tape will be transcribed, and that you will receive false names or titles for the purposes of the data analysis. This will ensure that everyone's personal information stays confidential. As discussed in the consent form, these tapes will be destroyed in 3-5 years. We ask again that you refrain from discussing the comments of group members and that you respect the rights of each member to remain unidentified. Are there any questions that I can try and answer?

"Thank you for your contribution to this project. This was a very successful focus group interview and your honesty and sincere responses will be an enormous help to our work. Again, we thank you very much and appreciate your involvement. Take care".

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